Can Christian Theologians Reason Post-Metaphysically?
Jürgen Habermas and the Semblance of Intellectual Virtue

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Introduction

Can Christian theologians reason post-metaphysically? Yes, they can. The task of Christian theology involves cultivating and displaying faith, hope, and charity *as intellectual virtues* within both scholarship and teaching. Because post-metaphysical reasoning seeks "excellence in deliberation," it enables the appropriate presentation of faith, hope, and charity in the pedagogical and theoretical aspects of learning and life.

My argument hinges on the distinction between *giftedness* and *possession* concerning the three theological virtues.[1] Because the virtues of faith, hope, and charity are not *possessed*, properly speaking, by Christians or Christian thinkers, post-metaphysical reasoning provides an opportunity for a confessional yet secular approach to Christian theology. The virtues of faith, hope, and charity are not possessed because they are gifts of the Holy Spirit. They are individually exercised but not individually owned. The four cardinal virtues—prudence, temperance, courage, and justice—are considered "natural" virtues because they are both *possessed* and *exercised*. Charity, hope, and faith are rightly called "infused" virtues because they are given as gifts of the Holy Spirit; they are not possessed, but they are exercised.[2]

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[1] "In the end, then, Christian virtue is not so much initiated action but response to a love relation with God in Christ. This is why it makes sense for…Aquinas to say that true or complete virtue is fundamentally not our own achievement but is rather infused in us by God's grace, which saves and enables us" (Stanley Hauerwas, *Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics*, [University of Notre Dame Press, 1997], 68).

[2] On the contrast between these sets of virtues, and the question of natural vs. theological, see G. Scott Davis, *Warcraft and the Fragility of Virtue: An Essay in Aristotelian Ethics*, (Wipf & Stock, 2011), 27-110.

What does it look like to exercise faith, hope, and charity in our scholarship and our teaching? I answer this question, initially, by following the Apostle Paul's pattern of reasoning (1 Cor. 13). Scholarship and teaching ought to exhibit patience and kindness toward our objects of study; our scholarship and teaching should not be boastful or envious. We ought not be arrogant or rude within the classroom or during academic meetings. We should not insist on our own way of thinking by making our concepts and expectations normative in an absolutist and binary sense (this is where post-metaphysical reasoning nurtures a Pauline logic applied to the intellectual virtues). We should be neither irritable nor resentful but, rather, rejoice with the truth. To rejoice *with* the truth does not necessarily entail claiming knowledge of the truth in clear and distinct ways: "for we know only in part" (1 Cor. 13.9). Faith, hope, and charity function as intellectual virtues for how to teach and write as if "we know only in part."

Can post-metaphysical and secular academics reason theologically? The Augustinian wording for this question sounds like this: whether secular intellectual virtue is actually splendid vice?[3] I say that secular intellectual virtue cannot be reduced to a description of splendid vice, because (as Aristotle observes) intellectual virtue does not concern the content of one's beliefs but, rather, "excellence in deliberation." Secular intellectual virtue that becomes or remains post-metaphysical does not wish to establish substantive content for actual beliefs but seeks "excellence in deliberation" within modern scholarship.

In this chapter, I present Jürgen Habermas's post-metaphysical, secular philosophy with these questions concerning secular intellectual virtue in mind. The fruit of this examination

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[3] Jennifer Herdt describes the Augustinian understanding of splendid vice in these terms: "Pagan virtue, virtue resulting from anything other than interruptive grace, cannot be anything but false and sinful" (Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of Splendid Vices*, [University of Chicago Press, 2008], 3). Because this kind of virtue is false and sinful, it is best described as "glittering" or "splendid" vice.

entails how *post-metaphysical* reasoning makes all the difference for secular intellectual virtue, because it attempts and nurtures "excellence in deliberation" without any commitment to substantive content in beliefs.[4] Habermas does not use the phrase "intellectual virtue." Habermas's language for intellectual virtue is "cognitive attitude," by which he means the ability to recognize our own habits and interests within our ways of reasoning and to communicate or think in such a way that our habits and interests do not block the inquiries and investigations of others.[5] I demonstrate that understanding faith, hope, and charity as intellectual virtues through Habermas's post-metaphysical philosophy achieves Habermas's expectation for what our "cognitive attitude" should be.

How do I demonstrate this? First, I briefly outline Habermas' post-metaphysical, secular philosophy. Second, I examine the question of how faith, hope, and charity work as secular intellectual virtues. Third, I offer tentative reflections on the task of teaching Christian theology within the setting of modern, public, secular colleges and universities; I invite others to make proposals on what teaching Christian theology post-metaphysically might look like within private, Christian institutions of higher education.

Why does this investigation matter, and why do I offer my own reflections on teaching post-metaphysically within the setting of modern, public, secular colleges and universities? This inquiry resulted from reflecting on teaching Christian and Jewish ethics in the Department of Religious Studies at the College of William & Mary—which is a modern, public, secular college.

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[4] Habermas describes the "secular" as both "nonreligious" and "postmetaphysical" (see Habermas, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, trans. Brian McNeil, [Ignatius Press, 2006], 21-28). However, not all self-described secularists actually reason post-metaphysically. Hence my claim that only post-metaphysical secular thinkers can cultivate secular intellectual virtue.

[5] For Habermas' technical explanation of his understanding of "cognitive attitudes," see *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro, (Beacon Press, 1971), 91-112, 191-245. For Habermas' clearer and more popular account of his use of "cognitive attitudes," see "Pre-Political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?" in *The Dialectics of Secularization*, 21-52.

I am drawn toward two approaches for teaching Christian ethics/theology within a religious studies context: (1) John Milbank's assertive approach where ancient and medieval Christian thought and practice represent the essential aspects and logic of the Christian tradition, which requires an aggressive and critical attitude toward modern Christian thought;[6] or (2) Jürgen Habermas's analytic approach to understanding Christian thought and practice post-metaphysically, where it is not my task as a professor to favor part(s) of the tradition over other parts on the grounds that the latter do not meet *my* conceptual expectations and theoretical standards. I do not assume that these are the only two ways to teach Christian theological reasoning within the modern academy, but they seem to represent two dominant tendencies for Christian theological reflections regarding the pedagogical task; they name the tendencies that I find the most interesting, provocative, and useful. However, in the terms of this essay, the Milbankian option represents a confessional approach where the intellectual virtues are both *possessed* and *exercised*. The post-metaphysical aspect of the Habermasian option provides an opportunity for a confessional yet non-aggressive approach to Christian theology. What follows is thus experimental: it teases out the pedagogical and scholarly implications of Habermas's post-metaphysical philosophy but in the terms of Milbank's Augustinian understanding of the virtues of faith, hope, and charity.[7]

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[6] My difference from Milbank is that I find Martin Luther's theological reasoning exemplary, alongside St. Thomas Aquinas' moral reasoning, within the Christian tradition whereas Milbank identifies how the tradition goes off the path of intellectual fidelity – and never recovers – after Thomas Aquinas' work. According to Milbank, nominalism and voluntarism are the major problems tht plague Christian theology after Thomas Aquinas. I find that Luther's doctrine of *sola Scriptura* prevents nominalism in his thought, and his complex appreciation of the natural law (surprisingly) resists voluntarism.

[7] For Milbank's Augustinian approach to the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, see *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, Second Edition, (Blackwell, 2006), xi-xxxi, 327-381, 404-440. For a helpful and honest evaluation of Milbank's declared Augustinianism, see James Wetzel, "Splendid Vices and Secular Virtues: Variations on Milbank's Augustine," in *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 32.2, (Summer 2004), 271-300.

Jürgen Habermas's Post-Metaphysical Secular Philosophy

Aristotle articulated how the purpose of intellectual virtue is not the content of our beliefs but, rather, "excellence in deliberation":

> But since the man who deliberates badly makes a mistake, while he who deliberates well does so correctly, excellence in deliberation is clearly a kind of correctness, but neither of knowledge nor opinion; for there is no such thing as correctness of knowledge…, and correctness of opinion is truth…. But, again, excellence in deliberation involves reasoning. The remaining alternative, then, is that it is *correctness of thinking*.[8]

I say that secular intellectual virtue is genuine virtue, and not splendid vice, if and only if it accomplishes "excellence in deliberation" through "correctness of thinking."

Post-metaphysical reasoning accomplishes "excellence in deliberation" through "correctness of thinking," especially in contrast to claims of knowledge and opinion, by focusing on *how* we deliberate rather than *what* we deliberate about. According to Nicholas Adams, in his book on Habermas's philosophy, post-metaphysical reasoning "is the acknowledgement that there is no deductive or discursive route from thinking to the grounds of thinking."[9] Adams continues, "To think post-metaphysically is not to deny such grounds, but to reject any attempt to explain them through theory [alone]."[10]

For Habermas, post-metaphysical thinking neither substitutes its own metaphysical foundations nor replaces traditional metaphysical foundations with a void of nothingness. In this sense, post-metaphysical reasoning is not: (a) anti-metaphysical, (b) anti-foundationalist, or (c) a new foundationalism. Post-metaphysical thinking is analogous to *non-foundationalism*, within philosophy and theology, in the sense that both non-foundationalism and post-metaphysical

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[8] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book IV, chapter 9, 1142b.

[9] Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 183.

[10] Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, 183.

reasoning seek to recognize how to go on when we neither have certainty (foundationalism) nor a shared ground (metaphysics) for arguments and ways of reasoning.[11]

Throughout his philosophical career, Jürgen Habermas displays how his post-metaphysical reasoning relates to ancient, medieval, and modern philosophy by narrating the history of philosophy in the following terms:

(1) Ancient and medieval philosophy committed itself to thinking in terms of metaphysics.
(2) Modern philosophy shifted away from metaphysics and developed different versions of epistemological foundationalism. None of these versions were post-metaphysical; rather, they all reduce metaphysics to epistemology.
(3) After Immanuel Kant, philosophy resisted epistemological foundationalism and slowly turned – not back to metaphysics – but to post-metaphysical reasoning. Post-metaphysical reasoning culminates in the philosophical career of Jürgen Habermas because his philosophy resists epistemological foundationalism but does not simultaneously dismiss the genuine possibility for deep reasonings (metaphysics).[12]

In relation to the Judeo-Christian tradition, Habermas also makes clear what post-metaphysical reasoning looks like:

> In this new situation, moral philosophy depends on a "post-metaphysical level of justification." This means in the first place that, as regards its method, it must renounce the God's eye viewpoint; as regard its content, it can no longer appeal to the order of creation and sacred history; and, as regards its theoretical approach, it cannot appeal to metaphysical concepts of essences that undercut the logical distinctions between different types of illocutionary utterances.

[11] Habermas suggests this connection between non-foundationalism and post-metaphysical reasoning as well: "A nonfoundationalist self-understanding…does more…than simply relieve philosophy of tasks that have overburdened it. It not only takes something away from philosophy; it also provides it with the opportunity for…a new self-confidence in its cooperative relationship with the reconstructive sciences." What kind of relationship? "A relationship of mutual dependence becomes established" (Habermas, "Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action," in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt & Shierry Weber Nicholson, [The MIT Press, 1990], 119).

[12] While Habermas seeks to continue the tradition of modernity, he is "anything but a dewy-eyed optimist." For instance, according to James Gordon Finlayson, Habermas "rejects Hegel's teleological conception of society as an objectified form of a self-developing spirit heading towards the goal of self-knowledge" (James Gordon Finlayson, *Habermas: A Very Short Introduction* [Oxford University Press, 2005], 74). Finlayson continues by saying that, concerning "the negative side" of modernity, Habermas thinks "modernization gives to rise to social pathologies – social disintegration, deracination, and feelings of alienation." He further contends: "On the positive side, modernity brings forth cognitive, economic, and practical gains that are worth preserving" (74). I appreciate Finlayson's clear, concise, yet nuanced account of Habermas' philosophy.

> Moral philosophy must justify the cognitive validity of moral judgments and positions without drawing on these resources.[13]

Habermas's guidance away from reasoning from the God's-eye perspective,[14] as well as his discouragement concerning the assertion of content, displays that he remains concerned with intellectual virtue rather than the substance of beliefs within moral philosophy and his understanding of the task of moral philosophy. Since he is not committed to the content of beliefs, or substituting the God's-eye perspective with another version of "the view from nowhere," he proves that secular intellectual virtue is not necessarily splendid vice. Habermas illustrates the role of the intellectual virtues within modern, pluralistic modes of argumentation. In this way, Christian theologians can and should reason post-metaphysically without worrying that they have sold their souls to the devil of secularism. Habermas's post-metaphysical reasoning requires theologians to make no commitments to secular claims, only to argumentation based upon certain "cognitive attitudes" or intellectual virtues.

Does Habermas's post-metaphysical reasoning make the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity impossible to exercise within academic arguments and public debates?

Faith, Hope, and Charity as Secular Intellectual Virtues

In what follows, I demonstrate that understanding faith, hope, and charity as intellectual virtues through Habermas's post-metaphysical philosophy achieves Habermas's expectation for what our "cognitive attitude" should be. I find that a medieval or scholastic disputation-like approach provides the best method of writing for this investigation, because it allows for my interpretation of Habermas to serve as responses to the traditional theological ways of reasoning (rather than

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[13] Habermas, "A Genealogical Analysis of the Cognitive Content of Morality," in *The Inclusion of the Other*, ed. Ciaran Cronin & Pablo De Greiff, (The MIT Press, 1998), 11.

[14] See Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, 104-105, 172-173.

presenting the traditional theological virtues on the standards and terms of Habermas's modern secular philosophy). In this section, therefore, I entertain the counter-arguments to my overall thesis before providing the particular defenses to my thesis statement. The counter-arguments come from traditional theological interpretations of St. Anselm on faith, the Apostle Paul on hope, and St. Augustine on charity. I provide Habermasian responses to each of these traditional theological interpretations on faith, hope, and charity.

Faith as Secular Intellectual Virtue or Splendid Vice?

It seems that secular intellectual virtue is best described as splendid vice, because all intellectual virtue rests upon the virtue of faith. St. Anselm's dictum "faith seeking understanding" means that the infused, theological virtue of faith becomes necessary for any and all understanding.[15] The notion of *secular intellectual virtue* suggests that the intellectual virtues requisite for understanding do not require the virtue of faith. As St. Anselm argues, however, true understanding cannot occur without faith; therefore, secular intellectual virtue is actually splendid vice.

While it is true that Habermas's post-metaphysical philosophy does not require faith for understanding, it is not true that his secular philosophy prevents the virtue of faith as ground for understanding. He comments:

> Thus modern faith becomes reflexive. Only through self-criticism can it stabilize the inclusive attitude that it assumes within a universe of discourse *delimited* by secular knowledge and *shared* with other religions. This decentered background consciousness of the relativity of one's own standpoint certainly does not necessarily lead to the relativization of articles of faith themselves, but it is nevertheless characteristic of the modern form of religious faith.[16]

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[15] See St. Anselm, *The Prayers and Meditations*, (New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 1979), 238-266.

[16] Habermas, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta, (Polity Press, 2002), 150.

For Habermas, faith functions reflexively in the sense that faith invites self-criticism through modes of self-reflection. Faith requires recognizing that we exist and think from a particular perspective, and faith further ensures that we do not attempt to universalize our particularity. Faith is not possessed because it can never be held in a stagnant or static way; faith always requires faithfulness. Faithfulness names the ability, the virtue, of recognizing the particularity of our claims and our patterns of reasoning.

In his conclusion to *The Future of Human Nature*, Habermas addresses the role of faith within secular society. His conclusions involve significant observations about faith and secular life; I outline these observations as three proposals concerning faith as an intellectual virtue in public and secular life. He remarks:

> To date, only citizens committed to religious beliefs are required to split up their identities, as it were, into their public and private elements. They are the ones who have to translate their religious beliefs into a secular language before their arguments have any chance of gaining support.[17]

Perhaps surprisingly, Habermas does not celebrate this fact about modern life. According to Habermas, the non-religious participants within secular life ought to make themselves as vulnerable as those "citizens committed to religious beliefs" make themselves. He claims, "only if the secular side, too, remains sensitive to the force of articulation inherent in religious languages will the search for reasons that aim at universal acceptability not lead to an unfair exclusion of religions from the public sphere."[18] Additionally, severing "secular society from important resources of meaning" will be equally problematic.[19]

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[17] Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, (Polity Press, 2003), 109.

[18] Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 109.

[19] See Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 109.

If the faith of religious believers continues to fuel their split identity within secular life, then Habermas predicts that secular life will suffer. Interestingly, Habermas presents a utilitarian argument for the inclusion of religious faith within public debates: to not include faithful religious believers within secular life diminishes the common good, because it eliminates helpful and interesting arguments ("resources of meaning"). Also, there is a deontological element to Habermas's proposal: no part of secular life should *a priori* or automatically exclude those who argue on the grounds of faith. In other words, faithful religious believers are persons too!

The second proposal that Habermas makes in *The Future of Human Nature* concerns what secular reasoning loses by translating religious reasoning out of the language of faith and into more generic, allegedly universal, terminology.[20] He comments, "Secular languages which only eliminate the substance once intended leave irritations."[21] For instance, Habermas thinks "something was lost" when "sin was converted to culpability, and the breaking of divine commands to an offense against human laws."[22] Habermas laments how the act of translation turned into substitution, and his proposal forward involves returning anew to how the language and logic of faith shapes religious reasoning in reflective and substantive ways. Faith grounds claims in ways that non-religious reasoning cannot. When the latter try to borrow arbitrarily, in a binary and substitutionary fashion, then Habermas thinks "something [is] lost."

Third, Habermas promotes the idea that those within secular life should engage traditionally sacred texts, not as an act of faith that religious readers display, but for the purpose of depth and understanding. Habermas does not think that the scholarly task involves "faith

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[20] For the clearest presentation of Habermas' defense of universalism, as well as concerns about universalism, see Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, 92-105.

[21] Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 110.

[22] Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 110.

seeking understanding," but Habermas encourages a faith-like engagement with traditionally sacred texts. Habermas recognizes that traditionally sacred texts represent the deepest sources of religious reasoning. His proposal concerns how those in secular life ought to maintain their "distance from religion without closing [their view] to the perspective it offers."[23] He provides a model for engagement for purposes of depth and understanding:

> In the controversy, for instance, about the way to deal with human embryos, many voices still evoke the first book of Moses, Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him." In order to understand what…"in the likeness of God" means, one need not believe that the God who is love creates, with Adam and Eve, free creatures, who are like him. One knows that there can be no love without recognition of the self in the other, nor freedom without mutual recognition. So, the other who has human form must himself be free in order to be able to return God's affection. In spite of his likeness to God, however, this other is also imagined as being God's creature. Regarding his origin, he cannot be of equal birth with God. This *creatural nature* of the image expresses an intuition which…may even speak to those who are tone deaf to religious connotations.[24]

For Habermas, faith should not be about self-assertion but about faithfulness to one's religious tradition as a particular way of reasoning. The faithful should not seek for those in secular life to agree with them, but they ought to expect those in secular life to engage with them. Further, those in secular life can engage with religious believers on their terms if those terms are made explicit and held to public standards of reasoning. Reasoning from Scripture allows for this, because interpretations of Scripture can be offered in self-critical and self-reflective ways. Religious believers cannot expect others to base their understanding on faith alone, but those in secular life need not dismiss the traditional claim that faith is required for understanding.

Therefore, Habermas's post-metaphysical reasoning allows for "faith seeking understanding" within the Christian tradition—as long as claims grounded on faith can be held accountable within a public setting. What is an example of this? Habermas models how

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[23] Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 113.

[24] Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 114.

grounding claims as an interpretation of Scripture meets his requirements for public accountability.[25]

Hope as Secular Intellectual Virtue or Splendid Vice?

It seems that secular intellectual virtue is best described as splendid vice, because the virtues are directed toward the Good. The virtue of hope maintains one's direction toward the Good. Within Christian theology, hope becomes an intellectual virtue because it serves as the virtue that directs our thinking. As the Apostle Paul reasons, the virtue of hope involves working toward what cannot be seen: "hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Romans 8.24-25). While Christian theologians cannot empirically verify the existence of the Good, they are neither irrational nor unreasonable when they posit the Good because, by doing so, they display the virtue of hope. Secular accounts of intellectual virtue are not committed to metaphysical notions of the Good; they dismiss the notion of the Good because it is not empirically verifiable. If they have hope, they usually place their hope in what "is seen"—which is not hope at all, only verification. Therefore, secular virtue is actually splendid vice in that it altogether misunderstands the virtue of hope.

While it is true that virtue is directed toward the Good, and one of the accomplishments of secular philosophy is that it rids the necessity of a shared metaphysics of the Good, this does not require understanding secular intellectual virtue as splendid vice. Through his post-metaphysical philosophy, Jürgen Habermas provides the framework for understanding how

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[25] My essay, "What Is Reparative Reasoning? Jürgen Habermas' Philosophy, Practical Reasoning, and Theological Hermeneutics," in *The Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*, 10.2, (December 2011), further develops this aspect of Habermas' thought.

secular intellectual virtue remains genuine virtue without being committed to a metaphysical notion of the Good. Oftentimes, Habermas's argument for the priority of the right over the good gets mistakenly interpreted as his replacement of justice over goodness.[26] In considering *intellectual* virtue, however, I find that Habermas retains a post-metaphysical notion of the good where the task of thinking becomes determined by the skills involved with argumentation and communication rather than the content of our beliefs.[27]

If my claim concerning Habermas's post-metaphysical notion of the good is accurate, then how does Habermas's post-metaphysical philosophy relate to Linda Zagzebski's neo-Thomistic virtue epistemology?[28] Both Habermas and Zagzebski think that "human interests" play a role in our rational and scholarly activities; the intellectual virtues prevent our "interests" from over-determining and overriding our objects of study. However, Zagzebski remains committed to an epistemological foundationalism that does not allow for Habermas's post-metaphysical reasoning to serve as a corrective to the epistemological foundationalism found within modern philosophy. Furthermore, from a Habermasian perspective, Zagzebski's account of intellectual virtue remains egocentric in the sense that she seeks intellectual virtue in terms of the beliefs and methods of knowing for the individual knowing agent.[29] Both of these differences

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[26] Habermas claims: "Without the priority of the right over the good one cannot have an ethically neutral conception of justice. This deficit would have unfortunate consequences for equal treatment in pluralistic societies. For the equal treatment of different individuals and groups, each of which has its own individual or collective identity, could only be assured by standards that are part of a shared conception of the good equally recognized by all of them" (Habermas, "A Genealogical Analysis of the Cognitive Content of Morality," in *The Inclusion of the Other*, 28). This claim gets interpreted in terms of a logic of replacement or substitution (insert any Aristotelian or Augustinian critique of Habermas' philosophy here).

[27] See Habermas, "A Genealogical Analysis of the Cognitive Content of Morality," 39-46.

[28] See Linda Zagzebski, *The Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and Ethical Foundation of Knowledge*, (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[29] I develop Habermas' non-egocentric moral reasoning in the next section of this essay.

make Habermas's post-metaphysical philosophy a more friendly conversation partner, for Christian theologians, than Zagzebski's virtue epistemology.

Habermas's post-metaphysical philosophy might maintain skepticism toward a metaphysics of the Good but does not require a complete dismissal of the possibility for intellectual virtue being directed toward the Good. In other words, Habermas refuses the binary of a metaphysics of the Good vs. the utter void of goodness.[30] Therefore, secular intellectual virtue is genuine virtue because its denial of the metaphysics of the Good—which is what virtue is directed toward—is not a denial of a post-metaphysical notion of goodness. A post-metaphysical notion of goodness calls into question the certainty of having metaphysical foundations of the Good but does not dismiss the possibility for some knowledge of the Good. For Habermas, like for the Apostle Paul, we see only "in part." Post-metaphysical philosophy makes it possible for this seeing "in part" to manifest itself in our reasoning and thinking.[31]

Within Habermas's post-metaphysical philosophy, the intellectual virtues direct themselves toward how particular disciplines define goodness without any single discipline

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[30] "A deontological moral theory…does not thereby banish questions of the good or unfailed life from the pale of rational treatment. It need only maintain that ethical discussions, in contrast to moral arguments, are always already embedded in the traditional context of a hitherto accepted, identity-constituting form of life. Moral judgments differ from ethical judgments only in their degree of contextuality" (Habermas, "Remarks on Discourse Ethics," in *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, trans. Ciaran P. Cronin, [The MIT Press, 1994], 105).

[31] In this way, the resemblance between Habermas' post-metaphysical philosophy and non-foundationalism keeps Habermas' logic from falling into secular vice. I believe that Richard Rorty's version of hope is best described as *splendid vice* because of his anti-foundationalism and nominalism. For instance, in his essay, "Failed Prophecies, Glorious Hopes," Richard Rorty makes the judgment that the New Testament has failed in terms of the hope that it promises. However, Rorty provides no grounds for making such a judgment. For Rorty, hope is a natural feeling that requires neither a foundation for its intelligibility (anti-foundationalism) nor a real object for its *telos* (nominalism). For my explanation of how Rorty's anti-foundationalism shapes his understanding of hope, see "Hope without Prophecy: On Richard Rorty's Understanding of Faith, Hope, and Love," in *Prophetic Pragmatism*, co-authored with Brad Elliott Stone, (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013); within this book, Stone defends Rorty's anti-foundationalism in his responsive essay, "Love and Liberal Irony: A Response to Goodson." For my more general critique of Rorty's nominalism, see "Theology After Epistemology: Milbank between Rorty and Taylor on Truth," in *Contemporary Pragmatism*, vol. 1, no. 2, (2004), 155-169.

claiming ultimate authority (concerning providing foundations) over other disciplines.[32] According to Habermas, philosophy neither "judges" nor "places" other disciplines—that is, other forms of knowledge—but, rather, "stands in" and "interprets" academic disciplines to one another.[33] While this means that Habermas comes out against theology as the queen of the sciences,[34] he comes out as equally strong against any form of scientism—whether the natural or social sciences stake ultimate authority over other disciplines.[35] In this way, intellectual virtues require the particular disposition of *humility* in relation to other disciplines and subject matters.[36] For the Apostle Paul, the virtue of hope mandates the virtue of patience; for Habermas, the virtue of hope requires the virtue of humility.[37]

Charity as Secular Intellectual Virtue or Splendid Vice?

It seems that secular intellectual virtue is best described as splendid vice because, as St. Augustine illustrates, the virtue of prudence is directed toward both charity for the neighbor and

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[32] Habermas favors the language of "the good life" and uses a post-metaphysical answer to the question, "what is the 'good-life'?" as a way to critique and negotiate the question of bio-technology and human nature; see Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 1-15.

[33] See Habermas, "Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter," in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt & Shierry Weber Nicholson, (The MIT Press, 1990), 1-20.

[34] See Habermas, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World," in *Religion and Rationality*, 67-91.

[35] For Habermas' understanding of the role of the natural sciences, see his critiques on positivism and its bad habits within the academy: *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 65-186. For Habermas' understanding of the role of the social sciences, see *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson & Jerry A. Stark, (The MIT Press, 1988), especially 171-189. In my essay, "What Is Reparative Reasoning?" I articulate how Habermas' understanding of practical reasoning prevents him from any sort of scientism.

[36] While my claim about humility concerns what I consider an implication of Habermas' post-metaphysical reasoning, Calvin O. Shrag and Eric Ramsey draw the same implication in regards to Habermas' theory of communicative rationality: "We need to practice our interpretive strategies with the humility demanded by the transversal play of rationality, while retaining our convictions in light of this" (Shrag & Ramsey, "Method and Phenomenological Research: Humility and Commitment in Interpretation," in *Human Studies*, 17.1, [January 1994], 136).

[37] For more on humility and patience as intellectual virtues within the disciplines of Christian ethics and religious studies, see my *Narrative Theology and the Hermeneutical Virtues: Humility, Patience, Prudence*, (under consideration with Oxford University Press).

the highest love of God.[38] As an intellectual virtue, prudence maintains proper priorities within theoretical wisdom for the knowing agent. Secular intellectual virtues are directed neither toward charity for the neighbor nor toward the highest love of God. Rather, secular intellectual virtues assume rational and substantial argument as their ultimate goal. The object of charity is not one's "neighbor" but, rather, rational human beings; irrational human beings do not deserve charity, only correction and/or protection.[39] Since prudence does not require charity, secular intellectual virtues are actually splendid vices.

While it remains true that Habermas does not (and would not) equate prudence with the highest love of God, as St. Augustine does, within a Habermasian understanding of prudence it remains possible to consider prudence in relation to charity toward one's neighbor. St. Augustine offers two definitions of prudence within "The Catholic Way of Life": "And prudence is love that wisely separates those things by which it is helped from those by which it is impeded."[40] His second definition of prudence describes prudence strictly in terms of love of God: "And prudence is love distinguishing correctly those things by which it is helped toward God from those things by which it can be impeded."[41] Augustine's transition from the first definition of prudence to the second definition concerns an addition, not a substitution. In other words, Augustine does not claim that prudence exclusively concerns the love of God; Augustine allows for prudence to be defined in terms of charity toward one's neighbor.

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[38] See Augustine, "The Catholic Way of Life and the Manichean Way of Life," in *The Manichean Debate: The Works of Saint Augustine,* I/19, (New City Press, 2006), 43.

[39] Deontologists tend to argue that irrational human beings need correction; utilitarians tend to argue that irrational human beings need protection.

[40] Augustine, "The Catholic Way of Life and the Manichean Way of Life," 43.

[41] Augustine, "The Catholic Way of Life and the Manichean Way of Life," 43.

Habermas seeks to develop a non-egocentric account of prudence. In his "Introduction" to Habermas's *Justification and Application*, Ciaran P. Cronin summarizes Habermas's approach: Habermas's "discourse ethics goes beyond both Kant and the Aristotelian tradition in understanding practical reason from the perspective of the interaction of a plurality of subjects rather than that of the individual deliberating subject"—which "demands that individuals look beyond their own needs and interests and take account of the needs and interests of others."[42] Hence Habermas's post-metaphysical account of prudence appears to fall in line with Augustine's first definition of prudence as oriented toward the neighbor. If prudence is oriented toward the neighbor, then can prudence become a concrete form of charity within secular intellectual virtue?

Because Habermas seeks to develop a non-egocentric account of prudence in his Discourse Ethics, Habermas's understanding of prudence proves to be an other-centered intellectual virtue that resembles Augustine's first definition of prudence as charity toward one's neighbor.[43] Habermas worries about the egocentric nature of prudence within an Aristotelian framework, where prudence is directed toward the individual moral agent. Habermas reports that, within Aristotelian reasoning, prudence comes with a communal aspect in its understanding of tradition as a source for practical wisdom; however, the ultimate goal for the virtue of prudence remains egocentric in the sense that it addresses the individual capacity for practical

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[42] Cronin, "Introduction," in Habermas' *Justification and Application*, xxii-xxiii.

[43] I attempt a synthesis here similar to Eric Hall's recent synthesis of John Milbank's Augustinian vision of charity with Richard Rorty's cruelty-free, pragmatic vision of charity; see Hall, "Pragmatic Charity: A Synthesis of Rorty and Milbank," in *Richard Rorty and the Religious: Christian Engagements with a Secular Philosopher*, ed. Jacob Goodson & Brad Elliott Stone, (Cascade Books, 2012), 91-118. The difference between Habermas and Rorty on charity involves Rorty's strict private/public distinction. While Habermas makes a similar distinction to Rorty's, he prefers to distinguish between "ethics" (collectively private) and "moral philosophy" (objectively public). However, for Habermas, "ethics" should not be egocentric; Rorty celebrates the egocentric nature of the private.

reason and the singular application of wisdom.[44] The Aristotelian understanding creates a context where a moral or thinking agent might be prudent but never encounter another moral or thinking agent. Based on the tradition as the source of wisdom, it might also be the case that a moral or thinking agent may encounter another person but only within one's own tradition.[45] If this happens, then the arguments do not challenge the received wisdom but serves only to continue traditional wisdom. In this case, prudence might be *possessed* but is never truly *exercised*.

Habermas proposes that prudence ought to be *exercised* without being individually *possessed*. This makes prudence a form of charity, in the Augustinian sense, because it displays how the primary purpose of prudence is, positively, to help the other through better and higher quality argumentation and, negatively, not to impede the other through poor and unreflective argumentation. Again, Augustine defines prudence as "love that wisely separates those things by which it is helped from those by which it is impeded." Habermas's emphasis on the quality of argumentation, as well as the skills necessary for communicative rationality, provides a way to understand charity as an intellectual virtue: we give to others by arguing well with them and expecting them to argue well with us.[46]

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[44] This marks the difference between Habermas' and Zagzebski's philosophical projects.

[45] Habermas calls this the "exclusionary" aspect of Aristotle's ethics: "Only those affected can themselves clarify, from the perspective of participants in practical deliberation, what is equally good for all. The good that is relevant from the moral point of view shows itself in each particular case from the enlarged first person plural perspective of a community that does not exclude anybody. The good that is subsumed by the just is the very form of an intersubjectively shared ethos in general, and hence it is the structure of membership of a community, though one that has thrown off the shackles of any exclusionary community" ("A Genealogical Analysis of the Cognitive Content of Morality," 30).

[46] This analysis confirms Adams' judgment concerning Habermas' "Augustinian account of reality"; see Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, 234-237.

Does Secular Intellectual Virtue Display Excellence in Deliberation?

It seems that secular intellectual virtue is best described as splendid vice because, according to John Milbank, secularism results from Christian heresy—namely the heresy of voluntarism, where God's will is given priority over God's intellect or reason.[47] The natural law is defined as participation in the eternal law, which is found in the mind (*intellectus*) of God.[48] The case for secular virtue rests upon divorcing the natural law from eternal law. As the virtues complete or orient us toward eternal law through participation in the natural law, the intellectual virtues ought to complete and orient us toward the mind of God through participation in the specifically intellectual aspects of the natural law. If secular virtue results from the split of natural law from eternal law, then secular virtue is not true virtue because it fails to complete and orient us toward the mind of God. Secular intellectual virtue directs us toward human rationality through a secularized account and understanding of natural law—which is more akin to Kant's "the moral law within" rather than Thomas Aquinas's the natural law without.[49] If we are directed toward human rationality alone, then we never achieve the intellectual virtues: for intellectual virtue mandates excellence in thinking, and excellence in thinking requires submitting to the wisdom of God through the fear of God. As it says within the Church's Book of Wisdom: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1.7). Furthermore, Robert Wilken describes how the early Church based intellectual virtue exclusively

[47] Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 9-26, 380-435.

[48] See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Political Writings*, ed. and trans. R. W. Dyson, (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 83-125.

[49] See Milbank, "A Critique of the Theology of Right," in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture*, (Blackwell, 1997), 7-35.

on "seeking the face of God."[50] Therefore, secular intellectual virtue is actually splendid vice because it depends upon the split of natural law from eternal law—which results in a false or faulty account of knowledge that does not depend upon grounding wisdom in the fear of God.

In his book on Habermas's philosophy, Nicholas Adams both affirms and negates this stated objection concerning secular intellectual virtue in regards to how Habermas's philosophical work relates to the theological task. On the one hand, Adams claims that theologians cannot gain much from Habermas's post-metaphysical philosophy: "Habermas shows himself skillful in exposing problems with forms of theology that are eager to accept his terms of debate," but Christian theologians "abandon their own Christian tradition" when they "are willing to adopt and rely on a theory of communicative action [and post-metaphysical program]."[51] On the other hand, through a contrast between Habermas's and Milbank's work, Adams makes a convincing case concerning what Christian theologians might learn from Habermas's philosophy:

> I think the main issue [between Habermas and Milbank] is that Milbank is influenced by Romanticism and tends towards the belief that politics follows from the imagination, whereas Habermas…tends to assume that the imagination follows from politics. Thus Milbank's critique of Habermas will always be that his imagination is impoverished, while Habermas's critique Milbank (were he to mount one) would be that his politics is imaginary. My argument is that Habermas hits the problem's nail on the head: social relations have changed, and no theology from a single tradition can by itself provide the resources for coordinating argument and disagreement in the public sphere.[52]

How does this apply to the relationship between the imagination and the intellectual virtues within scholarship and teaching? The more particular question, following from Adams's observations is this: how can Christian theology recognize *both* its limits ("no theology from a

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[50] Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God*, (Yale University Press, 2005), 50-109, 291-310.

[51] Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, 199.

[52] Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, 115.

single tradition can, by itself, provide the resources for coordinating argument and disagreement") *and* its requirement to "seek the face of God" in virtuous ways?

Context matters for addressing this question: answering this question will look differently in the setting of a modern, public, secular college (like the College of William & Mary) vs. the setting of a private Christian institution of higher learning. I conclude this essay with reflections on how Christian theologians can recognize their limits while maintaining the virtues of faith, hope, and charity within the setting of a modern, public, secular college. I leave it to others, with more experience, to offer accounts of how to teach post-metaphysically within private Christian institutions of higher learning.

Concluding Reflections

Habermas's post-metaphysical philosophy teaches Christian theologians *not* to insist on our own manner of thinking by making our concepts and expectations normative in an absolutist and binary way (see 1 Cor. 13.4-5). How does Jürgen Habermas describe his post-metaphysical philosophy in this regard? He claims that post-metaphysical thinking will not be able to be the bearer of a semantic content that is "inspiring," the way that religions inspire for instance, and will be unable to replace metaphysical reasoning or repress religious reasoning.[53] He continues this theme in *The Future of Human Nature*:

> The moral point of view obliges us to abstract from those exemplary pictures of a successful or undamaged life that have been handed on in the grand narratives of metaphysics and religion. Our existential self-understanding can still continue to draw its nourishment from the substance of these traditions just as it always did, but philosophy no longer has the right to intervene in this struggle of gods and demons. Precisely with regard to the questions that have the greatest relevance for us, philosophy retires to a metalevel and investigates only the formal properties of

[53] See the final paragraph of Habermas' "Themes in Postmetaphysical Thinking," in *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans William Mark Hohengarten, (The MIT Press, 1992): "Philosophy, even its postmetaphysical form, will be able neither to replace nor to repress religion as long as religious language is the bearer of semantic content that is inspiring and even indispensable, for the content eludes…the explanatory force of philosophical language and continues to resist translation into reasoning discourses" (51).

> processes and self-understanding, without taking a position on the contents themselves. That may be unsatisfying, but who can object to such a well-justified reluctance?[54]

Following Habermas's proposal, my recommendation is that teaching Christian theology within a modern, public, secular university requires focusing upon the sources and ways of reasoning within the Christian tradition alongside a de-emphasis on the semantic content of religious claims. Religiously oriented persons (in their everyday practice) are scholars of Christian theology *if* they exercise faith, hope, and charity within their scholarship; secular oriented persons (in their everyday practice) can be scholars of Christian theology *if* they exercise the semblance of faith, hope, and charity within their scholarship. Post-metaphysical reasoning enables the semblance of faith, hope, and charity; these are not "splendid vices" but can be exercised as genuine intellectual virtues.

The virtue of faith reminds us that a particular source—usually Scripture—serves as the ground for Christian theological reasoning.[55] Cultivating and displaying the virtue of faith, within scholarship and teaching, simply requires us to take seriously Scripture as a source within the Christian tradition. What does it entail to take Scripture seriously? It involves allowing and working through multiple interpretations of scriptural passages, interpretations found within the tradition, rather than exclusively asserting what we think a particular passage has to mean. Practically speaking: "To be a post-metaphysical theologian," Nicholas Adams rightly suggests, "requires overcoming divisions of specialisation and reintegrating historical, biblical, dogmatic, and philosophical studies."[56]

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[54] Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 3-4.

[55] The distinctive claim of the "post-liberal" theologian is that Scripture serves as the only ground (*sola Scriptura*) for Christian theological reasoning. Adams comes to the judgment that while Habermas does not and "has not engaged with post-liberal theology," he "speaks with a remarkably Lindeckian [post-liberal] voice at times" (Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, 199). See George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, (Westminster John Knox Press, 1984).

Habermas observes that Scripture's significance comes about because it gives public accountability to religious claims, and it remains as a source of practical reasoning within religious traditions.[57] Scripture serves as the basis for the religious imagination, and it also supplies a standard for public accountability within religious studies. The virtue of faith enables us to implement Scripture as a norm for the public accountability of theological claims. St. Anselm's claim "faith seeking understanding" does not require *possessing* faith for understanding, but it does mandate *exercising* the virtue of faith for purposes of comprehension and genuine investigation within Christian theology.

Both the Apostle Paul and Habermas are right: the virtue of hope requires the virtues of humility (Habermas) and patience (Paul). To display the virtue of hope, within our teaching, involves a kind of humility where we do not assert the absolute truth of theological claims; it also requires that we develop patience toward our subject matter because we enter as and remain participants of a grand community of inquiries and see only "in part." Because we see "in part," we should not make thinkers within the Christian tradition sound backward or ignorant simply because they write in a different place and time than we do. Our job is not to make the work of early medieval Christian theologians completely relevant to the patterns and standards of today: to attempt to make them relevant violates the tenants of post-metaphysical reasoning, because it asserts an epistemological foundationalism that everyone must submit. Post-metaphysical teaching enables us to struggle through thinkers, writing in a different place and time from where we are, with the *hope* that their logic and patterns of reasoning relate to some aspect of where we are today. However, if they fail to relate, then exercising the virtue of hope ought to make us

[56] Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, 181.

[57] See Goodson, "What Is Reparative Reasoning?" in *The Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*.

stop and ask, not if we are right and they are wrong (such a question, again, violates a post-metaphysical approach), but what do they know or see that we do not. How does our seeing "in part" block us or prevent us from comprehension? Habermas's post-metaphysical philosophy is not a Gadamerian, Romantic notion of the "fusion of horizons"; instead, it identifies an honest way to investigate the logic and patterns of reasoning of thinkers and writers who remain "other" to us in terms of space and time.

While the standard for teaching ought to be "inspiration," the inspiration ought to come from *how well* we present the arguments of others and not *that* we assert and proclaim our own arguments. How do we achieve this? With the virtue of charity: for charity allows and enables us to present the arguments of others through the deliberate, rational reconstruction of their theological reasoning. I am not suggesting that we actively refuse making normative judgments on arguments and maintain our silence in the face of the other. Rather, making normative judgments and speaking from our own voice requires skillfully sustaining the virtue of charity within our teaching. Skillfully sustaining the virtue of charity is the Augustinian name for prudence![58] By developing prudence, as a form of charity, we come to know *how* and *when* to make normative judgments on the arguments of others and provide concrete guidance on the subject matter. From a post-metaphysical perspective, our primary task concerns presenting the arguments of others in an equally charitable and just manner. Post-metaphysical philosophy reminds us that our jobs as Christian theologians concerns *professing*, not *confessing*.[59] If we exercise the virtues of faith, hope, and charity within the classroom setting and within our

[58] "And prudence is love that wisely separates those things by which it is helped from those by which it is impeded" (Augustine, "The Catholic Way of Life and the Manichean Way of Life, 43).

[59] This distinction has to be maintained in the context of modern, public, secular colleges. Both religious (in their everyday practice) and secular (in their everyday practice) scholars must sustain it, not only those who are practicing religious believers. On the significance for why both must sustain this distinction, see Habermas' *The Future of Human Nature*, 109.

writing projects, then we will excel as professors within modern, public, secular colleges and universities.[60]

[60] Morgan Elbot served as a research assistant for this essay; her input and work greatly contributed to my understanding of Habermas' post-metaphysical philosophy. Andrew Cutrofello, Andrew Gardner, Quinn McDowell, Todd Ream, and Catherine Robey provided helpful suggestions, all of which improved the essay.

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