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ŽMOGUS JO TECHNINIO REPRODUKUOJAMUMO EPOCHOJE: AR DIEVAS DAR GALI MUS IŠGELBĖTI?

Human Being in the Age of His Technical Reproducibility: Can God still Save Us?[1]

SUMMARY

The paper suggests some considerations on Jürgen Habermas' approach to the ethical problems caused by the development of biotechnology, which makes it possible to manipulate the human genome and thereby put us on the threshold of the age of technical reproducibility of human beings. In this regard, special attention deserves the fact that, in search of a solution to these problems, Habermas seeks assistance from religion. He perceives the need to move from an emphatically secular interpretation of modern society to the recognition that we already live in a post-secular society. Habermas is convinced that a dialogue is necessary between believers and non-believers. According to him the condition for the possibility of such a dialogue is our ability to translate elements of a religious message into secular language. The article discusses the role of awareness of the limits of such a translation.

SANTRAUKA

Straipsnyje pateikiama keletas pasvarstymų, susijusių su Jürgeno Habermaso požiūriu į etines problemas, kurias sąlygojo biotechnologijos raida, atvėrusi galimybę manipuliuoti žmogaus genomu ir tuo būdu atvedusi mus prie žmonių techninio reprodukuojamumo epochos slenksčio. Šiuo požiūriu ypatingo dėmesio nusipelno tas faktas, kad ieškodamas šių problemų sprendimo, Habermasas ieško religijos pagalbos. Jis suvokia poreikį atsisakyti pabrėžtinai sekuliarios modernios visuomenės sampratos ir pripažinti, kad gyvename post-sekuliarioje visuomenėje. Habermasas įsitikinęs, kad yra būtinas tikinčiųjų ir netikinčiųjų dialogas. Tokio dialogo galimybės sąlyga jis laiko sugebėjimą išversti religinius turinius į sekuliarią kalbą. Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas tokio vertimo ribų įsisąmoninimo vaidmuo.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: biotechnologijos, etika, žmogaus orumas, Habermas.
KEY WORDS: biotechnology, ethics, human dignity, Habermas.

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INTRODUCTION

As Nicholas Adams has noted "Habermas is an unusual atheistic and secular philosopher: he makes positive claims about religion in modern society and at the same time insists that moral theory must be post-religious or post-traditional." (Adams 1996: 1) Perhaps the most striking expression of this Habermasian unusualness is the notion of "post-secularity" which became popular after Habermas' speech *Faith and Knowledge* (*Glauben und Wissen*) on 14 October 2001 on receiving the Peace Prize of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association at St. Paul church in Frankfurt am Main. Since 1849 St. Paul church has been the symbol of German democracy: the church became the seat of the Frankfurt National Assembly (*Frankfurter Nationalversammlung*), the first freely elected German legislative body which announced and published the first democratic constitution. In his speech, Habermas labeled the modern social order as "post-secular society" (Habermas 2003: 103). Let's look at this notion a bit closer. What did he mean by that?

SECULARIZATION AND MODERNITY

At first glance, the very notion of a "post-secular society" may suggest the idea of a straight-line historical line of development. According to this, the "pre-secular" world would first have followed secularization, which in turn would be replaced by a "post-secular" society. To some extent, this observation can be considered as correct. As it is well known, the term "secularization" comes from the 17th century and primarily indicates the enforced transfer of church property to the state. Yet the process of secularization itself implicates several further phenomena. Central to this is the emancipation of the secular areas of religious supremacy. Politics, economics, law, science, education, art are increasingly withdrawing from the prescriptions and control of religion and evolving according to their logic. Thus, religion is gradually forced out of the public sphere into the sphere of private with the result that religious beliefs begin to erode, and their transmission is increasingly unsuccessful. And the influences of the institutions that are considered as "religious", in society and in the way of life of individuals start rapidly to decrease. In his speech on *Faith and Knowledge Habermas has noted*:

> In Europe, the term "secularization" first had the juridical meaning of a forced conveyance of church property to the secular state. This meaning was then extended to cover the rise and development of cultural and social modernity as a whole. Ever since, "secularization" has been subject to contrasting evaluations, depending on whether its main feature is seen as the successful *taming* of clerical. According to the first reading – "taming" – religious ways of thinking and forms of life are *replaced* by rational, in any case superior, equivalents, whereas in the second reading – "stealing" – these modern ways of thinking and forms of

> life are *discredited* as illegitimately appropriated goods. The replacement model suggests a progressivist interpretation in terms of disenchanted modernity, while the expropriation model leads to an interpretation in terms of a theory of decline, that is, unsheltered modernity. Both readings make the same mistake. They construe secularization as a kind of zero-sum game between the capitalistically unbridled productivity of science and technology on the one hand, and the conservative forces of religion and the church on the other hand. Gains on one side can only be achieved at the expense of the other side, and by liberal rules which act in favor of the driving forces of modernity. (Habermas 2003: 103–104)

The second aspect of this process is related to what can be called *rationalization*. Since the Enlightenment, religion has become strongly associated with a certain *irrational* principle, following which a human being is deprived of sovereignty. So, it is not surprising that rationalization has taken the form of destroying religious "prejudices".

To both aspects adjoins the third one, which carries any evaluative moment. It may be labeled as *modernization* and originated with the ideas of Max Weber regarding the role of rationality in the transition from traditional to modern society. According to Habermas,

> [t]he concept of modernization refers to a bundle of processes that are cumulative and mutually reinforcing: to the formation of capital and the mobilization of resources; to the development of the forces of production and the increase in the productivity of labor; to the establishment of centralized political power and the formation of national identities; to the proliferation of rights of political participation, of urban forms of life, and formal schooling; to the secularization of values and norms; and so on. (Habermas 1990: 2)

THE BENEFITS OF SECULARIZATION, RATIONALIZATION, AND MODERNIZATION

At first glance, this triple process of secularization-rationalization-modernization brings considerable benefits. This includes, for example, a significant increase in individual freedom because of the declining influence of the religious institutions, as well as the increase in knowledge of science independent of world-view restrictions or the widespread containment of religiously motivated conflicts by the secular state and a corresponding legal system. Such indisputable advantages have powered the conviction that the process of secularization is a straightforward process of progress that will inevitably lead from the darkness of unexplained conditions, into the bright light of a civilization determined by scientific thought, technical innovations, and a liberal way of life.

One might suspect that religion has become increasingly marginalized on this path, if not completely disappearing. But that is precisely what did not happen; rather, religion persists even in secularized life contexts: not only in the private sphere of life but also in the social public sphere. So, when Habermas speaks of a post-secular society, first, he means that the relationship between

secularized society and religion has changed and that the tension between the two has not disappeared, but merely adopted a new form (McKenna 2017). Of course, the democratic principle of the equality of all members of the society requires that the interests of religious communities and individuals will be considered. But according to Habermas, this does not mean that religious members of post-secular society should be merely tolerated as a kind of handicapped persons who cannot be "enlightened" and "cured" from "religious superstitions" due to their innate mental limitations or whatever.

According to Habermas, the secularized society needs the help of its religious members, because it is becoming increasingly clear that the process of secularization involves not only profits but also losses and threats. Habermas admits that the Enlightenment's project of the total "rationalization" of human life in such a way that the exclusive motive of any human activity would be the human reason, has been in crisis because, in the progression of development of the "rational" structures of society, the "rationality" itself attained a distorted form – the form of *instrumental* rationality. In order not to become blind to these losses and dangers, secularized societies must take religions seriously and involve them in the process of social self-understanding. Insofar as they do, they are post-secular societies.

THE HELPLESSNESS OF THE INSTRUMENTAL REASON

An illustrative example of the helplessness of the instrumental reason is its inability to resolve the question about the permissibility of human interference into the human genome by cloning or modifying the human genetic code. The development of genetic technologies eliminates the distinction between artificially produced and natural arisen. Thus, the difference between the technical processing of the material and the "cultivating" way of dealing with the living disappears too.

Habermas notes that artificially changing our genetic structure shifts the line between what we are by nature and what we freely decide and do ourselves. In this way, there is changed the very structure of our moral experience. In the naturalistic treatment of human beings, Habermas sees the infringement of the dignity of human beings and the equality of all people.

In an article published in1998 in "Süddeutsche Zeitung" he writes:

> New products clearly also satisfy the interest of consumers. And this interest is often compelling enough to make moral considerations fade over the course of time. Isn't the reduction of suffering also a moral argument? (...) But in the case of human cloning, it seems to me that a weighty normative argument does come into play. There is a rational kernel to the archaic revulsion (*archaische Abscheu*) provoked by the vision of cloned human replicas. (Habermas 2001: 163)

It is important to note that Habermas' argument against the cloning of human beings is "archaic revulsion" in which,

according to him, a "rational kernel" is included. Our inability to solve the moral problems from the area of life sciences using logical reasoning and to find convincing arguments in defense of human dignity is an only particular case of the whole, which Habermas calls "derailing modernity" (*entgleisende Modernisierung*). Habermas wrote that practical reason cannot be sure of the insights of the theory of justice to counteract the failure of modernization:

> Pure practical reason can no longer be so confident in its ability to counteract a modernization spinning out of control armed solely with the insights of a theory of justice. The latter lacks the creativity of linguistic world-disclosure that a normative consciousness afflicted with accelerating decline requires to regenerate itself. (Habermas 2008: 211)

For Habermas, the main problem of pure practical reason is the *language* because

> [t]oday, the all-pervasive language of the market puts all interpersonal relations under the constraint of an egocentric orientation toward one's own preferences. The social bond, however, being made up of mutual recognition, cannot be spelled out in the concepts of contract, rational choice, and maximal benefit alone. (Habermas 2003: 110)

According to Habermas, the "language of the market" today penetrates all pores and forces all interpersonal relationships in the scheme of the self-centered orientation of one's preferences:

> Practical reason provides justifications for the universalistic and egalitarian concepts of morality and law which shape the freedom of the individual and interpersonal relations in a normatively plausible way. However, the decision to engage in action based on solidarity when faced with threats which can be averted only by collective efforts calls for more than insight into good reasons. Kant wanted to make good this weakness of rational morality through the assurances of his philosophy of religion. However, this same strict rational morality explains why enlightened reason unavoidably loses its grip on the images, preserved by religion, of the moral whole – of the Kingdom of God on earth – as collectively binding ideals. At the same time, practical reason fails to fulfill its own vocation when it no longer has sufficient strength to awaken, and to keep awake, in the minds of secular subjects, an awareness of the violations of solidarity throughout the world, an awareness of what is missing, of what cries out to heaven." (Habermas 2010: 18–19)

THE 'RESCUING TRANSLATION' AND ITS LIMITS

And yet, unlike postmodernists, Habermas believes that the project of modernization can and must be continued and that the communicative reason can solve the new problems that have arisen. That's why he requires to expand the circle of participants of communicative activities, namely, to include religious members of society as equal partners of communication. From Habermas' point of view, the acknowledgment of religious members of society as equal partners of communication expands the possibilities of communicative reason. We must recognize that religion as such doesn't accept any reason but rather rep-

resents some alternative form of reason. And exactly this alternative form of reason becomes peculiarly relevant due to the changed situation.

Habermas regards religion not only as a collection of non-verified dogmas that reason must overcome and replace with the rational statement but also as a depository of moral sensibility and deep intuitive insights, which may complement secular reason. Such complementation must be realized in a new form of communicating action which Habermas designates with the term "rescuing translation" (*rettende Übersetzung*) which is a paraphrase of Walter Benjamin's term "rescuing critics" (*rettende Kritik*) (Habermas 1972) and means the retelling of religious content in a *secular* language. According to Habermas, due to such translation, the content of biblical notions becomes accessible beyond the boundaries of a religious community, i. e. for people of different faith traditions or of no faith.

For Habermas, the main task of the post-secular society is to give the feelings, preserved in religions, a general resonance. He is convinced that the potential of religious language (its "encrypted semantic potential") can be unfolded into "an inspiring power" if it is transformed into "reasonable speech" *(begründende Rede)* so that its "profane truth" can be heard. His position Habermas summarizes using the notion of the regime of translation, which means that in this milieu appears secularization:

> Those moral feelings which only religious language has yet been able to give a sufficiently differentiated expression may find universal resonance once a salvaging formulation turns up for something almost forgotten, but implicitly missed. The mode for nondestructive secularization is translation. This is what the Western world, as the worldwide secularizing force, may learn from its own history. If it presents this complex image of itself to other cultures in a credible way, intercultural relations may find a language other than that of the military and the market alone. (Habermas 2003: 114)

At first sight, it seems as if we have to do with the local problem: how to replace *the religious* message with the message related to the area of secular. Of course, such a replacement must be so compatible as possible. But what does, in this case, mean compatibility of the messages? Let us take an example. In *Genesis* 1, 26 we read: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and overall, the creatures that move along the ground.'" For secularized people, who are educated in a modern school and are convinced that the human race arose not because of a simple divine decision, but because of a long and very complicated evolution of living beings, the biblical story of the creation of man seems to be a kind of fairy tale, a spawn of the imagination of ancient storytellers. Respectively, the idea of man's godlikeness seems to be meaningless.

However, for Habermas, the post-secular reading of the biblical story and its "rescuing translation" should reveal, that the idea of the human being as image and likeness of God can be under-

stood as the idea of an "equal dignity of all human beings" (die gleiche und unbedingt zu achtende Würde aller Menschen) that has to be *respected unconditionally*. He is convinced that such "rescuing translation" "goes beyond the borders of one particular religious fellowship and makes the substance of biblical concepts accessible to a general public that also includes those who have other faiths or who have none (Habermas, Ratzinger 2006: 45).

But is it so, that in such translation the content of the biblical image of Godlikeness of a human being should be "rescued"? Is it true, that the "God-likeness" of man and his "dignity' are the same? It is obvious, that the answer can be positive only when we have to do with the translation of the *cognitive* aspect of the biblical message. However, in this case for Habermas more important is the idea of *unconditional respect* to each human being.

Let us notice that *unconditional respect* is: 1) not *cognitive* but rather *emotive* category; 2) is the subjective correlate of the *holy* (or *holiness*) which is the constitutive moment of the biblical concept of God. So, it seems to be useful to recall here the phenomenological description of the Holy by Rudolf Otto. Complementing the insight of Nathan Söderblom, according to whom the "Holiness is (…) even more essential than the notion of God" and that the "[r]eal religion may exist without a definite conception of divinity, but there is no real religion without a distinction between holy and profane" (*Söderblom* 1913: 731), Otto has shown that the holy reveals itself exclusively due to specific sensitivity that he designates as *sensus numinis*. (Otto 1932: 53)

AWARENESS OF OUR RELIGIOUS UNMUSICALITY AS *DOCTA IGNORANTIA*

But just here the problem arises. Let us remember that in the same speech, in which the notion of post-secular society was introduced, Habermas characterizes the secularized members of modern society as "those who are tone-deaf to religious connotations (religiös Unmusikalische)" (Habermas 2003: 114). This characteristic borrowed from Max Weber means the absence of specific sensitivity or ability to experience religious content immediately. It is not difficult to guess that "religious unmusicality" and the deficiency of *sensus numinis* are close interconnected or even the same thing. But if so, we have to admit that we, "religiously unmusical" beings are unable to perceive the moment of *unconditional respect* in such a way that it awakens in us as a positive feeling that motivates our attitude towards other people.

Does it mean that Habermas' project is doomed to a fiasco because we can't overcome our "tone-deafness to religious connotations"? In my opinion quite the contrary. The point is that when we come to an awareness of our religious unmusicality, then the process of dialectical negativity like Socratic "knowing of unknowing" or *docta ignorantia* by Nicholas of Cusa starts. The "rescuing translation", which, according

to Habermas, is the framework of post-secular discourse, can be considered not as "rescue" of something "what is missing" in the process of secularization, i. e. not as simple coming back of the elements of the religious contents or their restitution in altered secular form, but as practice, very performance of which helps us *to be aware* of our "religious unmusicality". It is not so little, as it may seem at first glance because such clear awareness of our limitations – *ein Bewusstsein von dem, was fehlt*, – is the best safeguard against confidence in our pseudo-infallibility and our attempts to control the communicative situation completely. That's why it seems to be quite reasonable to say that post-secularity arises when we become aware of our religious unmusicality.

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Endnotes

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