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NOSTRA AETATE AND THE CALL TO DIALOGUE

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Abstract

Nostra Aetate urges Catholics towards dialogue and understanding of other faith traditions. This paper considers the challenge presented by the practice of inter-faith dialogue to the standard liberal account of toleration as put forward by prominent contemporary liberal theorists. Such theorists argue that toleration can undergird modern pluralism despite mutual incomprehension between citizens of different moral or faith traditions. Against this view, I argue that modern 'hyper-pluralism' demands more than tolerance amidst incomprehension; the maintenance of stable pluralism requires practices of dialogue, including language learning and translation, through which adherents of religious traditions, and non-adherents, can develop mutual understanding. I explore the ways in which inter-faith dialogue establishes political and communal space in which 'engaged understanding' can be fostered.

In 1965 the Second Vatican Council issued a 'Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,' signed by Pope Paul VI and known as *Nostra Aetate*. Fifty years later *Nostra Aetate* retains its significance as a document urging Catholics and Christians generally to dialogical encounter with other faith traditions. It exhorts such people towards "dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions" to be "carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life."[1] In *Nostra Aetate* the aim of

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[1] "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions: *Nostra Aetate,*" 2, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html, accessed 9 September, 2014.

such dialogue is the development of 'mutual understanding' between religious faiths, which, in turn, will underwrite 'fellowship' and 'unity... among men.' The design of dialogue as set out in *Nostra Aetate* is therefore a harmonious pluralism between human subjects who engage each other out of a wide range of traditions. The declaration offers intimations about what might be involved in the meeting of traditions through dialogue: by acknowledging the complex connections between religion, culture and language, *Nostra Aetate* acknowledges the ways in which these realms are drawn together in the practice of dialogue. Following a pattern that reminds one of strains in Alasdair MacIntyre's work the declaration locates the dynamism of tradition in the diachronic refinement of language and concepts, a dynamism that is, in part, stimulated through dialogical encounter. The declaration therefore elevates a view of language as open to ongoing alteration and expansion.

Taking inspiration from *Nostra Aetate*, this paper positions dialogue as an essential component of modern pluralism. It considers the challenge presented by the practice of dialogue to the standard liberal account of toleration as put forward by prominent contemporary liberal theorists: that toleration can undergird modern pluralism despite mutual incomprehension between citizens of different moral or faith traditions. Against this view, I argue that tolerance without understanding is insufficient to counteract the fissiparous tendencies innate in modern 'hyper-pluralism'. From the point of view of political theory, *Nostra Aetate* is an invitation to examine the features of inter-religious dialogue — what I will call 'tradition constituted' dialogue in order to convey the rich complexity of meanings and resources brought to such exchanges. The task of translation is one such notable feature. Such dialogue, I argue, offers to political theory a model for developing 'engaged understanding' between participants in modern pluralist contexts.

1. Political Liberalism and Constitutional Essentials

In some contemporary liberal theories, particularly those following a Rawlsian strand of political liberalism, religion and religious expression are treated as a problem that must fall outside the rubric of public reason within secular society.[2] Although religion is tolerated, such liberals believe that religious language is not admissible within public debate. The problem, according to some secular liberals, is that

[2]See Nadia Urbinati, "Laicite in Reverse: Mono-Religious Democracies and the Issue of Religion in the Public Sphere," *Constellations* 17 (2010).

religious language — the language of 'comprehensive doctrines' — undermines the possibility of a shared public sphere and disrupts social harmony in a pluralistic society. My concern here is twofold: does this framing of the 'problem' of religion anticipate fully the range of ways religion, in an era of globalisation, can enter the public sphere and disrupt social harmony; and, following this, does it deal adequately with the problems of incomprehension and lack of understanding between traditions?

John Rawls limits the requirement of 'public reason' to what he terms 'constitutional essentials' or 'matters of basic justice'. However, in some of the literature inspired by Rawls' conception, the requirement that citizens adhere to 'public values' and 'public standards' is extended beyond the originally limited frame. Thus Stephen Macedo argues that "a fundamental *political* [my italics] demand is to convert unthinking habits and practices into reasons or to revise our practices to accord with reasoned standards." Further, we must "seek justifications that can be shared by people who disagree reasonably and permanently" with others' underlying religious or philosophical ideals.[3] In a similar vein, Nadia Urbinati asserts that all citizens should be inspired by a 'moral duty' to translate from personal beliefs to publicly acceptable language, given the 'truly concrete risk' that religious groups will subvert the civil character of law by using the political process to insert their 'private' principles into legislation. Citizenship should therefore be thought of as "a civil identity that requires a sacrifice of personal views from all members."[4] Arguments such as these evince what Will Kymlicka terms a 'spillover effect' through which a 'purely political conception' is applied beyond its ambit.[5]

But what happens when there is disagreement between religious traditions over issues that have nothing to do with asserting influence over, say, the civil character of the law? In pluralist societies religions rub up against each other in many more ways than can be contained in prevailing — and reductive — definitions of 'the civil public sphere'. Such an instance occurred at a public university in Regensburg, Germany in 2006, when in the course of an argument

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[3]Stephen Macedo, "In Defense of Liberal Public Reason: Are Slavery and Abortion Hard Cases?" in *Natural Law and Public Reason*, eds. Robert P. George and Christopher Wolfe, Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2000, 2-3.

[4]Urbinati, "Laicite in Reverse," 16.

[5]Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 236.

supporting a necessary relationship between faith and reason Pope Benedict XVI quoted a 14th century Byzantine (Christian) Emperor.[6] The Emperor, said Benedict,

> addresses his interlocutor with a startling brusqueness, a brusqueness that we find unacceptable, on the central question about the relationship between religion and violence in general, saying: "Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached."[7]

The Pope elaborated on the story to extract the Emperor's point — 'not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God's nature' — but his use of this brief extract was interpreted by some as an argument that Islam validates violence over and above reason. Some others — a minority — responded violently, which, in turn, caused yet others to find proof of a particular link between Islam and violence, or more generally, religion and violence. For these latter observers, here was evidence of the challenge presented by religion to the social peace of pluralistic liberal democratic societies.

The Regensburg affair might be construed by the aforementioned liberal theorists as an instance of failure to meet the 'reasoned standard' that political liberalism demands. But what was fundamentally at work was misunderstanding and incomprehension (which can each be assigned to both the Pope and his critics). A significant shortcoming of political liberalism as set out by Macedo is here brought into focus. The point of political liberalism is to underwrite a form of public justification that respects the freedom and equality of all citizens, specifically with regard to the coercive powers of the state.[8] But, as the Regensburg lecture indicates, there is a wide range of expressive activity taking place outside the bounds of deliberation over constitutional essentials that can initiate public, violent and thus politically relevant conflict.

Enter the concept of dialogue. Alongside violence, the Regensburg lecture prompted an invitation to dialogue — extended by one religious tradition to another and pursued in public, suggesting the reality of an already more spacious public sphere than that

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[6] "Lecture of the Holy Father: Faith, Reason and the University – Memories and Reflections," available [online]: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html, accessed 22 April, 2014.

[7] "Lecture of the Holy Father: Faith, Reason and the University…"

[8] Macedo, "In Defense of Liberal Public Reason," 21.

recognized in the secular liberal formula. The invitation came in the form of an open letter to Christian leaders signed by 138 Muslim leaders, chiefly scholars, from a number of countries, including western secular states. Quoting the Qur'an and the New Testament, the letter called for peace and understanding based on the *translation* of key principles of each tradition into a 'common word' — in this instance, love of the One God and love of the neighbour.[9] The letter, *A Common Word Between Us and You* (ACW), initiated replies from across the Christian tradition, and the Jewish tradition. ACW has evolved to become a 'serious and sustained discourse among people of different faiths, cultures, and beliefs'[10] — accompanied by a host of other practical engagements.[11] If we accept modern secularism as the experience of 'hyper-pluralism', that is, the proliferation of 'hyper goods' or moral and ethical visions between which citizens can choose, then modern institutional and cultural secularity (itself a hyper good) is faced with an ongoing task of negotiation with alternative and possibly rival comprehensive doctrines, including religious traditions. This negotiation, as Akeel Bilgrami emphasises, necessarily occurs out of and draws upon the 'internal resources' of the traditions involved.[12] At any given time, we can speak of 'the "repertory" of collective actions at the disposal of a given group of society.'[13] Dialogue aims at developing an understanding of another tradition's 'repertory', its range and its internal coherence (as well as its nodes of incoherence). Hence the urgency of the questions implicit here: does the language of 'public reason, via its narrow requirements for translation, along with the disciplinary frame set by 'toleration', impede engagement *between* the various traditions within a pluralistic society? And how does dialogue challenge this disciplinary frame?

2. Opposing Literatures

Much recent literature on pluralism is concerned to address challenges religion continues to present to the liberal-democratic

[9]See "A Common Word Between Us and You: The ACW Letter," available [online]: http://www.acommonword.com/the-acw-document/, accessed on April 26, 2014.

[10]Georgetown University, "A Common Word Between Us and You," available [online]: http://www.georgetown.edu/content/1242663526887.html, accessed on May 29, 2014.

[11]See "Major 'ACW Events," available [online]: http://www.acommonword.com/category/new-fruits/major-a-common-word-events/, accessed on June 1, 2014.

[12]See Akeel Bilgrami, "Secularism," in Boundaries of Toleration, ed. Alfred Stepan, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

[13]Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries,* Durham: Duke University Press, 2004, 25.

state. One stream of this literature is committed to the formulation that pluralism requires translation from comprehensive doctrines to an 'intelligible' language of public reason. Such a view accommodates the notion that a very limited mutual intelligibility will suffice for traditions to co-exist and co-operate in the public sphere. William Galston, for example, valorises the 'virtue of public reasonableness,' which includes willingness to listen to a range of views, and 'to set forth one's own views *intelligibly* [italics mine] and candidly as the basis for a politics of persuasion.'[14] In a similar vein, Nadia Urbinati's argument regarding religious pluralism implies that the issue of translation (with the goal of limited *intelligibility* in mind) is relatively unproblematic because during the electoral process private languages pass through a 'filtering process before and in order to enter the institutional sphere.'[15] Urbinati's conception of public translation through electoral politics asks only for a translation fit for the purposes of deliberation; the 'life uses' of the other's language, the meaning of an utterance, what Austin describes as its intended illocutionary force, are set aside.[16] Contra Galston and Urbinati, 'intelligibility', unsupported by translation as hermeneutics, so narrows the field of political exchange that it renders pluralism unstable - stable pluralism is unlikely to be achieved where tolerance is *accompanied by incomprehension*. On the model voiced respectively by Galston, Urbinati and Macedo, people who disagree on philosophical or theological fundamentals might yet be able to forge coexistence within political community 'based on a reasonableness they can share.' For Macedo, "this seems the best we can do."[17] A similarly 'restrained' vision is proffered by Steven Kautz who argues that, for the sake of 'moderation,' liberals are required 'to rest content with toleration... and not to seek in addition "praise" or respect for their private ways of life.'[18] To seek the respect (or, presumably, the understanding) of the community would be to assert that private choices are in fact communal business. Instead Kautz argues that "the generosity of more ordinary liberals, who tolerate moral strangers *even though they do not understand or admire them* [my italics], is one of the most agreeable liberal virtues."[19] On this view, the distance

[14]Cited in Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 289.

[15]Urbinati, "Laicite in Reverse," 15.

[16]Cited in Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8 (1969) 46.

[17]Macedo, "In Defense of Liberal Public Reason," 29.

[18]Steven Kautz, "Liberalism and the Idea of Toleration," *American Journal of Political Science 37* (1993) 620.

[19]Steven Kautz, "Liberalism and the Idea of Toleration," 624.

between the liberal citizen and the 'moral stranger' gives cause for admiration; the capacity to tolerate *without* understanding, to tolerate across incomprehension, is cast as a desirable quality of the virtuous citizen.

Though it shares the goal of social harmony, *Nostra Aetate* urges the converse: that adherents to religious faiths, who are also members of political communities, should strive for 'mutual understanding' — that is, they should strive to transform the 'moral stranger' into a common participant in a shared, *dialogical*, language community (and they should be open to being similarly transformed). This points to another stream of contemporary literature on pluralism, religion and toleration, which argues, with some variation in perspective, for a more expansive view of pluralism. Prompted by Wendy Brown's thesis that a modern ethos of tolerance serves to reduce encounter across difference, I look to the model provided by tradition-constituted dialogue, which takes as its telos *understanding* rather than 'intelligibility' or consensus. An examination of the practice of dialogue can thus be directed to address the argument that tolerance as a political, regulatory ethos (as advanced by contemporary liberal theorists) abandons 'the project of connection across differences'.[20] Under the aegis of this disciplinary ethos the opportunity for 'engaged understanding' is sacrificed, to be replaced, says Brown, with 'moralistic distance from or denunciation of difference.'[21] Brown emphasises that 'the cultivation of tolerance as a political end' has the effect of delimiting the political domain: such circumscribed politics ceases to be a realm of engagement in which "difference makes up much of the subject matter" and through which "citizens can be transformed by their participation."[22] Brown's view here, on face value, assumes agonistic colouring in its identifying difference (and the potential for conflict that it harbours) as a source of political creativity. However, on my reading, Brown's argument veers from agonistic accounts of the political in its focus on conflict being 'articulated and *addressed*' (italics mine) from a position of engagement.

Related to Brown's negative project of critiquing liberal tolerance is William E. Connolly's work on pluralism. Connolly calls for the instantiation of a 'deep pluralism', the cardinal virtues of which are 'negotiation, mutual adjustment, reciprocal folding in and relational

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[20]Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, 88-89.

[21]Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion...*, 88.

[22]Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion...*, 89.

modesty'. The application of these values is only to be suspended where the existence of pluralism is itself threatened by anti-pluralist, unitarian forces. The positive aim of 'deep pluralism' is to *inhabit* rather than *tolerate* the 'hyper-pluralism' that Taylor describes as characteristic of secular (though still religious) modernity. Hence the 'urgent need' to foster 'generous sensibilities' that will 'transfigure relations of antagonism' between faiths into relations of 'agonistic respect'.[23] The overarching aim of deep pluralism is "to forge a positive ethos of public *engagement* [italics mine] between alternative faiths."[24]

3. Dialogue versus Toleration

The essential opposition in the foregoing literature is between a dialogical model — such as enjoined by *Nostra Aetate* — that aims at 'transfiguration' of relations through *engagement*, and a post-Lockean conception of toleration. When a principle, such as toleration, penetrates a social imaginary, it prompts the introduction of new practices that are "made sense of by the new outlook." Hence, "the new understanding comes to be accessible to the participants in a way it wasn't before."[25] 'Modern social imaginaries' are therefore in dynamic correspondence with historically emergent and contemporaneously regnant theoretical ideas, of which toleration is one. It is not the intention of this paper to set out an historical account of the emergence of toleration as a principle in political and legal philosophy, and in communal life. To follow Taylor's account as set out in *A Secular Age*, toleration has been intimately bound up with post-Reformation political and philosophical developments, including dramatic shifts in the prevailing visions of the human subject. Toleration is therefore one element of a modern social imaginary that has grown from an 'idealization' to 'a complex imaginary' through 'being taken up and associated with social practices.'[26]

One of these 'social practices' is silence or 'restraint' in encounter with otherness. Dialogue is conceived of in terms of expression, whether in terms of 'language community', language learning, translation or interpretation, dialogue is a practice defined by speech — it is predicated upon a willingness to engage in difficult practices attached to clarifying language so as to enable understanding. By

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[23]William E. Connolly, *Pluralism,* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005, 48.

[24]William E. Connolly, *Pluralism,* 48.

[25]Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 29.

[26]Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 29

way of contrast, toleration is tellingly conceptualised in terms of 'silence' or reticence. Thus by Ira Katznelson's definition, toleration is 'a wilful act of omission, a deliberate silence or restraint, a suspension of commitment, and a willingness to share geographic and political space' with others of differing beliefs.[27] It is therefore 'less a matter of social justice than of forbearance in the face of diversity.'[28] Katznelson, echoing an observation made also by Wendy Brown, emphasises the way in which toleration implies 'targets of disapproval, asymmetric relationships.'[29] Such asymmetric relationships feature tolerance alongside disdain or disapproval. Subject (a) might feel disdain for the cultural attributes of subject (b), but nevertheless tolerates (b)'s proximity within the civic community. Toleration is therefore a 'rejection of available intolerance', a commitment to resist enacting disapproval through intervention. This is by no means to imply that the 'silence' of toleration altogether avoids conveying disdain or dismissal — toleration, as Brown emphasises, can operate so as to demarcate regulatory boundaries that uphold cultural inequality. With this in mind Katznelson attempts to lay out a more expansive view of toleration, arguing that the modern 'hyper-pluralism' described by Taylor should be met with a conception of toleration as a complex 'ethical and political site' that 'inhabits a location charged with tension.'[30] Toleration should be considered as a set of both *views* and *means* that are embedded in historical arrangements and circumstance.[31] Katznelson argues against thinking of toleration as a 'singular set of ideas and practices.'[32] Rather, we should approach toleration as a 'complex institutional site that can be apprehended with the goal of understanding its range, dimensions, and configurations.' Katznelson's instinct here appears to be to conceptualise toleration so that it encompasses practices beyond 'silence' that assist in negotiating the real historical and present tensions to which he alludes. To conceptualise toleration in this way, as involving both views and *means* opens room for an examination of the *activities* that reinforce the 'democratic ethos' recommended by Jan-Werner Muller, or, that produce the 'engaged understanding' urged by Brown. One such activity, which itself involves an array of

[27]Ira Katznelson, "A Form of Liberty and Indulgence," in *Boundaries of Toleration*, 40.

[28]Ira Katznelson, "A Form of Liberty and Indulgence," 41.

[29]Ira Katznelson, "A Form of Liberty and Indulgence," 41.

[30]Here Katznelson joins Taylor in thinking in spatial terms — to be discussed below. Ira Katznelson, "A Form of Liberty and Indulgence," 44.

[31]Ira Katznelson, "A Form of Liberty and Indulgence," 45.

[32]Ira Katznelson, "A Form of Liberty and Indulgence," 49.

sub-practices, is dialogue. A salient question, then, is whether dialogue is best thought of as one configuration of the wider framework of toleration. Pace Katznelson, to conceive of tradition-constituted dialogue as a sub-practice of toleration would be to ignore the challenge dialogue presents to toleration of a post-Lockean variant, and particularly as envisioned by Macedo and Kautz. Dialogue stands in complex relationship with toleration, pressing at its conceptual boundaries by asserting *understanding* as the aim of public engagement. Effective dialogue should certainly elevate the potential for *tolerance*, but tolerance as founded upon enhanced comprehension rather than 'virtuous' adherence to the principle of toleration. Dialogue diverges from toleration in its being predicated upon the hermeneutical rule set out by Gadamer, that 'we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole.'[33] Accordingly, attempts at relating to the 'moral stranger' cannot disassemble the 'relevant' or 'public' parts of the other's speech in order to achieve a restricted focus; a more detailed understanding is required.

4. Tradition Constituted Dialogue: Another Form of Public "Conversation"?

In this same spirit Luke Bretherton emphasises that the intensification of modern pluralism forces non-religious statutory bodies to 'move beyond mere tolerance and ignorance of the religious "other"' to a closer engagement that allows for them to make 'fine-grain distinctions between different groups within the same tradition'.[34] Developing this, the stabilisation of pluralism requires both statutory entities *and* groups defined by comprehensive doctrines to engage closely enough with other traditions so as to be able to make such distinctions. Such closer engagement also moves beyond a negative or stabilising role to underpin shared political action in pursuit of common goods. Bretherton uses 'translation' to refer to the Rawlsian requirement of translation from comprehensive doctrines to neutral public language. But, like Brown and Connolly, Bretherton does not deal at length with the centrality of translation to the interaction *between* comprehensive doctrines, especially in the context of dialogue. Moreover, contra Bretherton, there is a critical distinction to be made between conversation and dialogue. Whereas Bretherton appears to use these terms interchangeably, the term

[33]Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method,* Trans. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013, 302.

[34]Luke Bretherton, "A Post-Secular Politics? Inter-faith Relations as a Civic Practice," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79 (2011) 354.

'conversation' does not capture important features of dialogue. Dialogue involves more than directly communicative speech acts; it is constituted of close examination of the other's sources, self-reflexive examination, and the employment of language forms that transcend the merely conversational.

5. Dialogue and the 'Movement of Tradition'

Tradition-constituted dialogue entails complex forms of learning in which identity is maintained and communicated. Drawing on MacIntyre's discussion of tradition, dialogue requires not the learning of a shared neutral language of 'public reasoning,' but the learning of a new, *secondary* language and its contextual application (through such media as ritual, silence and textual interpretation — that is, those elements that give it its 'illocutionary force'). As such, language learning, translation and interpretation are practices central to dialogue. These practices direct attention not only to the details of 'alien' traditions, but also to the sources of one's own tradition, which may be illuminated afresh by encounter with the other. "Even the most genuine and pure tradition," says Gadamer, "does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated."[35] MacIntyre echoes this observation in asserting the dynamism of tradition, the constant potential for its reformation in light of encounter with 'otherness'. Thus MacIntyre and Gadamer meet in recognising that dialogue between traditions entails 'the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter.'[36] Blending the insights of Gadamer with MacIntyre, the 'movement of tradition' of which Gadamer speaks is seen to be bi-directional: it includes an outward movement by which a given tradition meets an alien 'other', and an introspective movement stimulated by this encounter with otherness, through which scripts, practices and language are re-assessed and, conceivably, reformulated. Here Gadamer's and MacIntyre's arguments converge with that of *Nostra Aetate,* which similarly intimates the dynamism of religious tradition, positing that religions that are bound up with 'advanced culture' have 'struggled to answer the same [eternal] questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language' (NA, 2). As *Nostra Aetate* indicates, tradition constituted dialogue involves the pursuit of intimations; and it opens possibilities for the development of new usages for the key terms of a given

[35]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 293.
[36]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305.

tradition. If, heeding Chantal Mouffe, we adopt a Wittgensteinian mode, we can think of dialogue as 'the creation of new usages for the key terms of a given tradition, and of their use in new language games that make new forms of life possible.'[37] Here becomes recognisable a correspondence between Mouffe's understanding of language games and Taylor's conception of language as establishing new 'language communities' (and thus, presumably, new forms of life).

6. The Meeting of Language Communities

For Gadamer, understanding, the telos of dialogue, is to be thought of 'less as a subjective act' than as a form of *participation* in 'an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated.'[38] Or, as Dalmayr puts it, in terms that echo Taylor, 'the common world fostered by language involves not only a sharing of ideas or points of view but also a sharing of practices.'[39] The vital point here is, to use Taylor's formulation, that the 'practice largely carries the understanding'.[40] Dialogue establishes a new set of relations between the participants through the process of shared speech acts that, in their being addressed 'to a previously spoken word' and 'in the prospect of a to-be spoken word,' establish a community that is committed to being in dialogue over time.[41] Dialogue therefore not only *accommodates* the meeting of separate communities, it establishes a *new* community brought together by certain practices.

Taylor's concept of 'language community' is an apt conceptual frame with which to think about religious traditions in dialogue — it denotes a community that is formed out of language and that, in turn, acts as a context 'within which language grows.'[42] Faith traditions fit within this conceptual frame as communities in which language is developed — in which the 'movement of tradition' occurs.

Moreover, the dialogical context — whether it be formal interfaith dialogue or coexistence in a context of religious pluralism — itself acts as a framework for the development of a new, *dialogical*, language community. Thus Taylor's argument that language can be deployed to create 'public space,' and that public space has participants. Indeed,

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[37]Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political,* London: Verso, 1993, 17.

[38]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 302.

[39]Fred Dalmayr, *Integral Pluralism: Beyond Culture Wars,* Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 2010, 122.

[40]Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 107.

[41]Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 108.

[42]Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 234.

public space 'is just what exists between participants, making them such in the act of communication.'[43] Dialogue can therefore be conceptualised in terms of 'space', defined by language, which accommodates 'transformative participation.'

7. Dialogue as Political Space

In both his work on language and human agency, and in more recent work on the 'perils of moralism' in contemporary life, Taylor speaks in terms of 'spaces' and 'space creation'. To probe this conception of dialogue as 'space', it is useful to look to a further instance in which Taylor employs spatial terms to describe a 'vertical dimension' in political, social and cultural life that is 'one of reconciliation and trust'. Taylor contrasts this with a 'horizontal dimension', in which procedural conventions dictate the conditions of engagement (conventions or codes that he views as symptoms of modern 'nomolatry'). The horizontal space is defined, on my reading, by the requirements of deliberation, thus limiting the range of language and reference permissible — the priority is to arrive at deliberative goals through the 'efficient' use of politically 'appropriate' language. This is the space in which participants are enjoined to be 'reasonable', a term that evokes a range of connotations about what is an 'appropriate' form of political subjectivity. On the other hand, the 'vertical space' is a political space in which 'sense-giving features', the whole background of meanings that *resource* public dialogue, are not circumscribed by the procedural conventions of political liberalism (which is not to say that the vertical space accommodates no conventions at all).[44] The community in dialogue is situated in this second space. Dialogue, aimed as it is at *understanding*, is inimical (within reason) to strictures being placed upon the cultural resources or expressions that can be brought to the fore. Thus MacIntyre's point that "the less that is shared," the more difficult becomes the task of translation, so that "more possibilities of untranslatability will seem to threaten."[45] The 'dialogical political space' can therefore be thought of as a communal space or forum in which the cultural complications of expressive, linguistic or symbolic difference will be addressed not through distance-maintaining 'tolerance', but through the task of translation and the achievement of understanding.[46]

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[43]Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language,* 282.

[44]Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 109.

[45]Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?,* London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1988, 387.

[46]See, Philip S. Gorskiand Ates Altinordu, "After Secularization?" *Annual Review of Sociology* 34 (2008).

Importantly, dialogue is a political space in which the focus of the participants is common, "because they are attending to the common object or purpose together."[47] Dialogue proceeds by means of language and expression, and to give something expression 'can be not only to get it in articulate focus, but also to place it in public space, and thus to bring us together *qua* participants in a common act of focussing.'[48] This 'topical common space' can take form on a 'public' scale — as it does with interfaith dialogue — where it is the site for the negotiation of publicly relevant political projects. It is more limited and focused than the 'public sphere' described by Habermas, which transcends such topical public spaces to become what Taylor describes as a 'metatopical' common space in which the 'commonality' is partly imagined. If 'commonality' is produced in the topical common space of dialogue, it is through the practices in which participants engage.

8. The Practice of Translation

One such 'transformative' practice is that of translation, which is central to dialogue. Language, says Taylor,' is a capacity to apply a web of terms, and never the ability just to use a single term,' a point that anticipates Alfred Stepan's observation that religious traditions are 'multi-vocal'.[49] Stepan's notion of the 'multi-vocal' nature of tradition might usefully be interpreted with reference to Taylor's argument that it is impossible to separate language from other 'symbolic-creative expressions' conveyed through music, poetry or dance. Language can indeed give direct expression to a particular subject through the act of talking *about* something. But, following Taylor, we can move beyond language construed in its 'narrow sense' to discern a range of 'symbolic expressive capacities' in which language is implicated. Taylor's view of language positions it, following Herder, in terms of a 'web' of meaning that is formed and developed in dialogue, in 'the life of a speech community.'[50] If we envision religious traditions as dynamic 'webs' constituted by language, institutions, symbolisms and interpretative practices, then dialogue between traditions, engaging these elements, will feature language that extends beyond the 'directly' communicative to an 'expressive' mode.

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[47]Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 113.
[48]Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, 260.
[49]Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, 258.
[50]Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, 234.

The 'multi-vocal' nature of religious traditions makes central the task of language learning that MacIntyre places at the heart of tradition-constituted dialogue. Gadamer argues that 'interpretation is necessary where the meaning of a text cannot be immediately understood.'[51] Similarly with traditions: we are, following the historian, to interpret the 'data of tradition' in order 'to discover the true meaning that is expressed and, at the same time, hidden in them.'[52] In approaching this issue of interpretation/translation a number of questions arise. Firstly, upon whom does the onus of translation fall? Dialogue places the onus of translation on all the parties involved — participants must engage in translation of their own tradition and interpretation of the other's tradition. It is an activity in which agents can truly *participate* insofar as it requires that they bring their fore-meanings to the dialogue. Translation in the course of dialogue involves an insertion of content into a dialogical context in which it conceivably is re-shaped. Yet, translation between traditions, while accommodating the possibility of new understanding, should not be thought of as succeeding to the degree to which it 'sets over' the meaning of an original text. Instead, according to James Boyd-White, we might think of translation as 'the composition of one text in response to another, as a way of establishing relations by reciprocal gesture.'[53] White argues that there is no "translation," "only transformation achieved in a process by which one seeks to attune oneself to another's text and language."[54] Yet, to diverge from White, translation and transformation are not at odds — rather, the former is a vehicle for the latter.

Secondly, what is the scope for translation? This requires clarity about the kind of understanding aimed at in dialogue. As pointed out earlier with reference to Bretherton's terminology, dialogue is to be distinguished from conversation by its more ambitious hermeneutical aim. The scope of 'hermeneutical understanding' as indicated by Gadamer is broad and this widens the ambit for translation. We understand the sense of a text, or for our purposes a doctrinal component or practice of a tradition, 'only by acquiring the horizon' against which it is situated.[55] The efforts of interpretation and

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[51]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 345.

[52]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 345.

[53]James Boyd, *Justice as Translation: An Essay in Cultural and Legal Criticism,* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990, 255-256.

[54]James Boyd, *Justice as Translation...*, 254.

[55]Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 378.

translation — that is, the efforts towards understanding — must therefore be directed not only to the text or component that is of particular interest, but also towards its standing in relation to the meanings of other components of the tradition. Thus, following Taylor, meanings resemble words situated in a semantic field, the grammar of which must be comprehended in order to see how the various elements fit together. Similarly with tradition: 'engaged understanding' would aspire to some comprehension of the grammar of tradition. Dialogue, structured hermeneutically into question and answer, is a way of coming to terms with an alien grammar. In the processes of translation and interpretation, participants in dialogue attend to the other tradition, while also witnessing how it is handled (interpreted and employed) by its adherents.

9. Conclusion

Toleration is thought of as being instrumentally valuable because it offers the prospect of social harmony. However, the Regensburg speech demonstrates that a background principle of toleration, unaccompanied by understanding, is insufficient to stabilise pluralism. As per the above discussion, tradition-constituted dialogue offers a challenge to post-Lockean liberal toleration in the social practices that it cultivates, particularly those of translation and interpretation, which are oriented towards the goal of understanding. In this sense, dialogue rejects the 'silence' of toleration and the maintenance of an epistemic gulf between the citizen and the 'moral stranger.' Moreover, it establishes spaces in which more expansive efforts at communication are realised, beyond the scope allowed for by 'public reasoning' of the Rawlsian variety. Kautz expresses concern that to endorse 'respect' as a principle of communal life would be for the community to "undertake to teach each citizen... what to think."[56] But, on the contrary, dialogue, of which respect is a constitutive principle, suggests the importance of reciprocal *teaching* and *learning*. And it is this readiness to teach and to receive that is most pressingly implicit in *Nostra Aetate*. It is through the hermeneutical structure of question and answer, through dialogue, that the assignment imparted by the declaration is to proceed, so that its audience might "recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral" that reside in the different religious traditions they encounter and live alongside (NA, 2).

[56]Kautz, "Liberalism and the Idea of Toleration," 620.