Editorial

Introduction: Cultural and Religious Pluralism in the Age of Imaginaries

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In recent decades, the paradigm of secularization has been under pressure. In continental philosophy in particular, the idea that religions will gradually lose their function within modern societies due to emancipatory processes of rationalization and individualization is being embraced less and less. The "secular age" is being re-envisioned as a time in which the secular and the religious mutually inform and transform each other. This implies that the realms of experience and imagination, usually understood as immanence and transcendence—that is, the human world and the divine world—enter a new relationship.

Pursuing a multifaceted tradition of cultural critique regarding modernity—from Kant and Hegel to Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger—one of post-war continental philosophy's key projects has been and remains the critical analysis of what is called "globalization", specifically of a fundamentally plural world in which the distinction between reality and imagination is becoming highly problematic.

This complex condition is analyzed as a cultural and religious pluralism of imaginaries, marking the so-called "end of the grand narratives". Against the stable and compelling ideologies and worldview systems, a world of radical difference and "super-diversity" has opened up, in which the meaning of life and the sense of the world are addressed in a permanent play of hybrid, temporal, and unstable imaginaries. Although this cultural and religious plurality is often associated with freedom and creativity, many continental philosophers stress the urgency for a critical analysis, focusing on the impact of cultural and political relationships of power within pluralism and on the uncontrollability, agonism, and violence accompanying these relations. Pluralism, in philosophical theory and political practice, is a contested concept, as the authors of this Special Issue and of previous Special Issues of *Religions* have pointed out (e.g., Spickard 2017; Kaltsas 2019). In the article by Isolde de Groot, Fernando Suárez-Müller, and the Guest Editors of this Special Issue Bram van Boxtel and Laurens ten Kate entitled *Resonance as Pluralism*, the authors join this debate on pluralism by stressing how the concepts of diversity and pluralism are indispensable for the critical study of modern society. However, diversity and pluralism are related yet distinct notions. As the two tend to be used in the same context, sometimes even interchangeably, they introduce a differentiation between the terms and specify their own understanding of them.

Diversity is commonly used to refer to the increasing presence of different ethnic, religious, and social groups in modern societies. Through the interplay of different forces, most notably globalization, societies increasingly play host to a multitude of different groups and diverging cultural identities. Even societies that were once typified by their homogeneity are now confronted with a more diverse population. This form of diversity, however, is not limited to the existence of multiple groups in a society; it also describes increasing heterogeneity within these groups. Steven Vertovec coined the term superdiversity to describe this increasing diversity (Vertovec 2007). As a concept, diversity is fundamentally oriented towards tracing difference; in this sense, the authors primarily understand it as a descriptive concept that denotes the multiplicity of identities in modern society.

Pluralism, in contrast, is often interpreted as a political concept with normative undertones that can be understood not only as an acceptance but also an affirmative response to the existence of this diversity. In a previous Special Issue of *Religions* that focused on religious diversity, the Editors contrasted the "normative framework that rules religious pluralism" with "a descriptive notion of religious diversity" (Pace and Da Silva Moreira 2018, p. 3). This differentiation not only applies to religious pluralism but also to discussions on modern cultural, social, and political pluralism more broadly.

The normative frameworks that inform the interpretations of pluralism vary. Perhaps the most influential notions of pluralism are informed by the legacy of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. The Rawlsian plea for reasonable pluralism entails the claim that in a democratic society, diverging worldviews not only tolerate each other but actively recognize the limitations of their own positions. As no comprehensive doctrine can reasonably be expected to be endorsed by all citizens, views cannot be forced upon others; a pluralist society and its institutional arrangements can thus only be grounded on a shared political culture in which some epistemic modesty is practiced (Rawls 1993). In a similar vein, Habermas further sketches out the requirements for pluralism in the public sphere by translating the characteristics of communicative action into the functioning of deliberative democracy (Habermas 1981). Pluralism is not a contingent fact for Habermas: the pluralization of forms of life is one of the significant products of modernity's process of rationalization—one that necessitates his 'postmetaphysical', procedural account of justice. Pluralism can thus be thought of as one of the key challenges of modernity, driving the Habermasian project (Ashenden 1998).

This work is challenged by what may be called agonistic pluralism, proposed by thinkers like Chantal Mouffe (2000) and William Connolly (2005), who see the striving for consensus as a denial of pluralism's fundamentally political and open-ended character. Though very different in their analyses, the positions of Rawls and Habermas on the one hand, and of Mouffe and Connolly on the other, both focus on the political, institutional, and procedural demands of pluralism. What separates these conceptualizations of pluralism from theory on diversity is that pluralism focuses on the requirements for interaction between different groups and identities, affirming this interaction, whilst the notion of diversity acknowledges the differentiation between identities in a more or less neutral fashion.

In this Special Issue, next to the article by Van Boxtel et al., six more contributions add to the important and urgent field of philosophical and political research on pluralism, whether initiated and carried out in the French context (e.g., Paul Ricoeur, Bruno Latour, and Emmanuel Levinas), the German context (Jurgen Habermas, Hartmut Rosa, and Edmund Husserl), the South American context (Leonardo Boff), the Indian context (Zoya Hasan), or the Anglo-Saxon context (e.g., Hannah Arendt (1958), Charles Taylor, Steven Vertovec, William Connolly, John Searle, John Hick, James Lovelock, John Dewey, Anne Primavesi, Fazal Rizvi, and Ryuko Kubota). The seven articles further develop theories of pluralism in relation to imagination in the crossover area between secularity and religion. Although all the contributions position themselves in this crossover area, either implicitly or explicitly, four of them focus on new theoretical and empirical research on pluralism, whilst the other three primarily engage with the theme of imagination.

We consider the studies by Youngjin Kiem, Fernando Suárez-Müller, Khalid Anis Ansari and Caroline Suransky, and van Boxtel et al. to fall under the first category. Kiem redefines religious pluralism in conversation with Husserlian phenomenology by analyzing filled and empty intentionality. Suárez-Müller investigates Latour's possible contribution to an eco-humanist approach to religious pluralism by critically analyzing Latour's project of terrarism. Ansari and Suranksy's study engages with the dynamics of religious plurality and caste inequality in the Indian context, introducing the Pashmanda discourse as a contestation of dominant religious social imaginaries. They do so in dialogue with Hasan, Taylor, and Connolly. Van Boxtel et al. analyze pluralism in terms of responsive relationality as relationships of resonance. Their prime interlocutors are Rosa, Arendt, and Levinas.

In the second category, we have placed the articles by Héctor Acero Ferrer, Lize-Mari Mitchell, and Hans Alma. Acero Ferrer aims to reframe liberation theology as a set of social imaginaries—making use of Ricoeur's theory of memory and cultural imagination—against the backdrop of pluralist societies in Latin America. Mitchell demonstrates that intercultural competence development within higher education is still dependent on a neoliberal social imaginary, referring to the work of Rizvi and Kubota. In dialogue with Connolly and Dewey, Alma advocates a non-anthropocentric form of humanism based on creativity and imagination; she coins this as the spirituality of the (im)possible.

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