

Introduction

Biological cells have boundaries, but the boundaries are permeable. They allow for imports from their surrounding environments but also for their own exports into it. They are thus in continual interaction with the world, taking from it but also giving to it. Boundaries are important. No cell could exist as such or function appropriately without them. In this book I suggest something similar regarding the relations of sacred and secular views of the world. They are distinct from one another and recognition and analysis of the distinction is important and necessary. But there is also a critical sense in which each contributes to the other, complementing its partiality with its own partiality, and in this way constituting a larger whole. Neither, in other words, is capable by itself of sensitizing us to the immensity of the world or the challenge and wonder of our lives as human beings in the world.

Religion contributes to the secular outlook on the world a sensibility and awareness that the secular *qua* secular lacks, namely, explicit reference and attunement to the existential and ontological import of the sacred. And secularism contributes to religion an awareness of the insistent obdurances of the world and of the contours of the prevailing culture that the sacred, in order to be in effective touch with the world and its own times, must continue to be sensitive to and to take fully into account. What results from this convergence of perspectives is a larger, more adequate awareness, but also a deeper sense of the wondrous, haunting mystery of the world—a mystery that no admixture of finite religious and secular perspectives—to say nothing of either the religious or the secular by itself—is capable of finally comprehending or dispelling.

Outright dismissal of current secular culture convicts religion of myopia and irrelevancy. And secularism, without attunement to the allure of the sacred as I shall characterize it in this book, closes itself off from a

vital dimension of experience that adds much needed purpose, depth, and meaning to the world and to our lives as humans in the world. Religion and secularism, or the sacred and the secular, are thus complements to one another, not opponents of one another. Each is partial by itself. A fuller and more adequate comprehension requires what each can and should contribute to the other. Their relationship is analogous to the permeable membrane of the cell, a demarcation or border through which each contributes to the other and receives from the other essential sources of insight into the whole of life. The distinction between them remains important and is not eliminated, but the border dividing them from one another is porous, allowing for their constant interactions with one another. The metaphor of the biological cell reminds us of the necessary interrelations of the sacred and the secular.

Having said this, however, the problem is posed of how to understand the respective natures of religion and secularism in such a manner as to do justice to what I argue to be the complementary relationship between them. This is the task I undertake here. It is no easy task, to a large extent because the search for an adequate characterization of the nature of religion, understood in a comprehensive manner that takes into account the whole range of the great religions of the world, is a notoriously thorny problem. I approach the problem with trepidation, but the concept of religion I propose and develop is that religion turns finally on an attested momentous reality of the sacred—encountered, discerned, and put into practice in a wide variety of ways by the great religious traditions of the East and West and also reflected in the indigenous cultures of the world.

The secular is then to be understood as an outlook that lacks an explicit, sustained focus on the sacred as thus analyzed and understood. But this negative characterization makes room for everything else that a secular perspective can contribute to our perception and understanding, and it is necessary that we include these contributions in our concept of the secular when thinking about its relations to religion. Religion, properly understood, does not try to dictate to secular culture but rather shares with it in a spirit of learning from and relating meaningfully to its history, art, morality, politics, economics, science, and technology. And secular culture, for its part, does not try to substitute itself for religion but is sensitive to the special dimensions of or outlooks on experience, thought, and practice religion addresses and portrays.

Necessary distinctions between the secular and the religious having been made, we need to continue to do as much justice as we can to the multiple interactions and mutual contributions of the two perspectives.

We live in a dauntingly complex, demanding, mysterious world, and both religious and secular approaches to the world should be allowed to have their say. Neither approach by its limited nature can be adequate alone. Each should complement and inform the other. And it would not hurt for each to keep the other questioning and off-guard, and in that way aware of their respective limitations. There is a difference between slavishly assenting to the assumptions and maxims of either of the two perspectives, on the one hand—each perspective thereby rejecting the other out of hand—and persistently inquiring critically but appreciatively into both sets of assumptions and maxims, on the other. A disconnected, entirely self-contained cell is, after all, a dead cell, devoid of nurture and sustenance and with no way to make its distinctive contributions to a larger whole.

In the chapters of this book I expose and discuss the inadequacy of certain conceptions of the nature of religion, conceptions that turn out to be stereotypes rather than satisfactory analyses of the full range of religious outlooks as these have been developed and expressed historically, and as they continue to develop and be expressed today. Secularism is then falsely distinguished from religion on the basis of these stereotypical misunderstandings of religion.

One such stereotype is the idea that all religions or persons of religious faith by their nature are fixated on and yearn wistfully for a *timeless*, carefree state of being thought to be available to them in the future, or alternatively for a future personal existence that is believed to be *everlasting*, that is, to temporally endure forever. Some forms of religion admittedly fit this characterization, but others clearly do not. I devote this book's *first chapter* to arguments against this commonly alleged preoccupation of all types of religion and against the related notion that only secular forms of faith are capable by their nature of accepting, cherishing, and defending human existence limited to a finite time that is bounded by beginnings and endings, births and deaths. I also argue against the contention that only secular outlooks are capable of recognizing existence in time as *essential* to the meaning and value of human existence because only they sense that a life without pervasive, temporally constrained care and concern would be no life at all.

I strongly concur with the last claim about the positive value and importance of life in time but make strong objection to the allegation that affirmation and acceptance of it is somehow exclusive to the secular outlook on life and thereby excludes religion. I also argue in the first chapter that it is plainly fallacious to regard only secular outlooks and forms of life as

being fervently committed to working for social justice here on earth within readily accepted conditions and limits of finite time. Religious outlooks are not generally barred by a claimed all-consuming focus on a future timeless or everlasting personal existence from exercising full responsibility to work for moral causes of the social and political type within the constraints of the temporal world. In fact, they are more often than not strongly motivated to do so. This way of drawing the distinction between the religious and the secular must also, therefore, be firmly set aside.

Chapter 2 brings under strong criticism the idea that all religions claim to have infallible or absolute knowledge about at least the most central doctrines or beliefs of their systems of thought, and that secular outlooks alone are comfortable with the idea that all the knowledge claims of humans, whether religious or otherwise, are fallible and open to critical questioning and dispute. When religious claims to infallible truths are said to be grounded in sacred texts, they show themselves to be oblivious to the ineliminable hand of human beings in the origination and writing of such texts, and to the necessary role of humans in editing, preserving, and giving canonical status to such texts. Such claims also fail to recognize that the texts would have little value, importance, or meaning apart from fallible human attempts to interpret and apply such texts to their own times, exhibiting to their fallible readers the continuing applicability of the texts to the cultures of later times.

It is simply false to think that religions *as such* can be characterized as failing to overlook the role of fallible human knowledge or claims to knowledge in the area of religion, and to contend that only secular outlooks by their very nature are willing to recognize and accept this role in all the domains of thought and experience. This stereotypical depiction of the nature of religion admittedly (and regrettably) applies to some religious outlooks and traditions of past and present times, but it does not apply to all of them. A credible distinction between religion and secularism cannot be drawn in this manner.

A central thesis of chapter 2 is that all claims to knowledge are fallible and reflect the fallibility and finitude of human beings. There is no way in which religious thought, experience, or putative revelation can immunize us against our fallibility and finitude. This fact is perhaps made especially manifest when it comes to thinking about the future. The alleged certainties of one time can become the falsehoods or at least the dubitable claims of another. This is the clear lesson of the past, and it is a lesson about scientific claims as well as about other kinds of claim to truth. There have been two

major scientific revolutions so far, and we have no way of knowing whether or not there will be ones at least as major, and as overturning of fundamental, commonly accepted scientific beliefs, in the future. As creatures of time, we are caught in the contingencies and uncertainties of life in time, to return to the theme of chapter 1.

Religious claims to infallibility and absolute certitude are not only untenable. They can also be highly dangerous and disruptive to harmony, peace, and justice. The violent religious conflicts of the Thirty Years' War, following on the Protestant Reformation and the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation, are cases in point, as are historically attested and religiously motivated pogroms, wars of colonial conquest and domination, and attempts to violently repress religious dissent. Such conflicts are not restricted to the West, although they are amply demonstrated there. They are also characteristic of the history of the East. In both parts of the world, insistence on the infallibility and absolute authority of any given set of religious beliefs, convictions, and practices can be demonic and destructive. It should be vehemently resisted and protested against in the name of religion, and not just on the basis of secular critiques of religion. And there is plenty of evidence to support the thesis that it has been and will continue to be resisted and protested by at least some genuinely religious people and deeply committed religious groups.

This last statement opens the way to the last topic of this chapter, and that is insistence on the inevitability and desirability of religious diversity. Such diversity is inevitable, given the patent diversity of cultures and historical periods throughout the world. There are indications of the commonalities of human beings throughout these cultures and periods, of course. But there are also fundamental differences. These differences are offenses to the religious mind only to the extent that the religious mind claims infallibility for its outlooks, beliefs, and practices. But viewed in another way, the differences are welcome invitations to ongoing religious enrichment, enhancement, and desirable change. Each religious person or religious tradition may turn out to have much to learn—not only from other religious outlooks, but also about both the limits and the hitherto overlooked resources of each particular outlook. Epistemic certainty is sometimes touted as the trait or goal of genuine religion, but humility is the more fundamental religious virtue. Genuine religious piety—at least as I view it—trumps claims to epistemic certainty. It does so because openness to religious truth wherever found depends on acknowledgment of the inevitable limitations of one's particular religious vision.

If it is desirable to continue to grow and develop in religious faith, given frank acknowledgment of human fallibility and finitude, then convictional religious openness is to be cherished as against the temptation to convictional religious closedness. The profound and suffusive sense of religious mystery inveighs against the temptation to think that authentic religious faith must reject, rather than welcome, religious differences. Such rejection is an in-principle denial of the cloud of mystery that necessarily surrounds, limits, and conditions all religious beliefs, forever beckoning them to further questioning, inquiry, and opening of heart and mind to other forms of religious faith.

This openness of outlook is the mark of genuine religion, as I view it, and it is a necessary antidote to prideful insistence on the infallibility of any aspect of one's own religious tradition or worldview. Religion as well as secularism can recognize and affirm the need to reject assertions of infallibility, and the religious sense of humility in the face of acknowledged surrounding mystery is a powerful safeguard against the temptation to assume or assert such claims. The fallible and the sacred are not opposed to one another. They go together and can and do work together, hand-in-hand.

Chapter 3 addresses the issue of the relations of religion to the natural and social sciences, the latter being viewed as expressions of secular perspectives on the world. Far from opposing themselves to the sciences, religions have essential and far-reaching lessons to learn from the sciences. To stand against the sciences in the name of supposed staunch religious faith is to clamp one's mind shut to what the sciences have to offer toward a more comprehensive outlook on the world. It is to reject a significant part of a culture that is deeply informed by scientific attitudes, methods, and findings, and that has been increasingly so informed since the seventeenth century CE. In other words, it is stubbornly to fly in the face of the modern world instead of seeking ways to appreciate it, learn from it, and speak with profound religious conviction and awareness to its outlooks, needs, and concerns. A religious stance that insists on disputing and flatly dismissing the contributions of the sciences shows itself to be out of touch with contemporary secular culture and its necessary place in and influence on the lives of contemporary human beings.

We can no more step out of our secular culture, replete as it is with scientifically imprinted modes of thought and practice, than we can step outside our skins. Religion has two tasks, at least, and not simply one, as far as our scientific culture is concerned. It must be in some highly important ways a critic of secular culture to the extent that secular culture fails to

be responsive to the role of the sacred in human life. But it must also be sensitive to ways in which secular culture can contribute to deeper religious sensitivity and understanding, challenging it to face toward the future and not just to be mired in the conceptualities and convictions of the past. Religion does not stand still any more than do other aspects of life in the world, and the sciences are forward-looking ways of thinking and acting that religion should not feel obligated simply to fight against or ignore. The secular needs the religious, but the religious also needs the secular. There must be porous boundaries on both sides if each is to contribute meaningfully to and to derive necessary nourishment and support from the other.

An important part of this positive picture of the interrelations of religious and secular—or in this particular case, secular scientific—outlooks is recognition of the limitations of each outlook. Neither is competent to swallow the other into its own perspective. Religion that ignores contributions of a scientifically informed secular culture to its own understanding of the world and of our lives as humans in the world ignores the necessary roles of ongoing time and change in informing our conceptions of the world. Because culture is not static, neither should religion be content simply to reiterate without critical reexamination patterns of thought inherited from the distant past. Religion cannot substitute for science or do the necessary work of science, and science continues to alter our cultural perceptions of the world. These facts must be acknowledged and taken fully into account by religious thinkers. But it is also resoundingly true—at least in my considered judgment—that science cannot take the place of religion or dismiss from relevance all aspects of religion that cannot be scientifically accounted for or contained.

The final section of chapter 3 explicates two different conceptions of science. The first one concentrates on the specific contributions of the natural and social sciences to our understanding of the world and of the place of human beings in the world. Science in this interpretation points to *the various fields* of the natural sciences; it makes general reference to the plurality of these fields and to their distinctive theories and findings. The second conception of science is focused on science as a *method* of investigation rather than as a collection of scientific disciplines and the particular aid of these disciplines in adding to, or at least suggesting, different ways of understanding ourselves and the culturally informed world in which we live.

Drawing on the perceptive thought of the American philosopher John Dewey, I argue that the method of scientific thought and investigation can be profitably employed in the field of religion as well as in the fields of

the natural and social sciences. Religion can be rendered as scientific in this broad methodological sense of the term *scientific*, which etymologically interpreted (Latin: *scientia*) just means *knowledge*, and by extension, *reliable knowledge*. In other words, religion so interpreted can be a source of reliable knowledge of the world, just as the natural and social sciences are commonly viewed by virtue of the extent to which they are committed to employing a method of inquiry that can bear the fruit of useful and important kinds of insight, awareness, knowledge, and understanding. I give careful attention in this chapter to Dewey's analysis of what this method of investigation should look like and to how it can and should be employed in *all* important areas of thought.

Thus, while the conclusions of religious systems of thought and those of the special sciences are different because of their different topics and concern, their respective methods of analysis can be similar. A commonality of method between secular and sacred types of inquiry brings them close to one another in approach and spirit, while their different targets of inquiry distinguish them from one another. Ongoing secular scientific thought and continuing religious inquiry are shown in this way to be complementary to one another rather than being opposed to one another, each seeking reliable knowledge in its own admittedly limited areas of thought and expertise, and each to the extent that it is willing to be committed to a common experimental method of investigation as that method is convincingly explicated by Dewey.

Chapter 4 deals with the relations of religious faith to the natural world and particularly to the ambiguities of the natural world that religion must recognize and confront. Inanimate nature has perils of many different kinds. These include natural disasters such as plagues, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, wildfires, hurricanes, droughts, and floods. Animate, nonhuman nature adds to these inanimate threats the inevitable dangers of predation that constantly confront the lives of biological creatures. The earth-wide biological project of utilizing the energy of the sun requires that life preys on life in order to protect and preserve life. Plants, no less than animals, are caught in this tangle of predator and prey. The human side of animate nature contributes further to these ambiguities the multiple forms of cruelty, corruption, extortion, warfare, and injustice human beings have routinely inflicted on one another throughout human history and continue to inflict throughout the world today. Then there is the radical ambiguity of the threats humans pose for the whole of nonhuman nature in the form of the present ecological crisis, a crisis that endangers all species of life on earth, including the human species itself.

The evident ambiguities, uncertainties, dangers, and sufferings characteristic of the world and of life in the world are met in some religious traditions and forms of religious faith by rejection of this world and by anxious hope and anticipation of another, entirely different world to come. Such rejection might be cited as the defining trait of religion, in which case religion becomes a kind of world denial. Secularism can then be seen as world-affirmation rather than world denial, and in this way it can be distinguished from religion. While this characterization of religion certainly fits some religious outlooks and forms of faith, it does not, I contend, fit all of them. There are world-affirming as well as world-denying religions, and not all religions are fixated on an imagined perfect life to come after the grave, or on such a radical transformation of this world that it will someday be replaced by a world entirely freed of the threatening ambiguities, uncertainties, and sufferings of the present world in its inanimate, nonhuman animate, and human aspects. And not all religions seek for ways to escape from the trials of life in the world that characterize the present lives of human beings.

I discuss in this chapter three prominent world-welcoming and world-affirming types of religion, and I seek to show in addition that the idea of a world entirely free of ambiguities is not even a conceivable world. It is not conceivable partly because a world of orderly, predictable laws is a necessarily ambiguous world, while a world devoid of laws that can sometimes hurt instead of help sentient creatures, is no world at all but a hopeless chaos. And even if such a world were conceivable, it would necessarily eliminate the possibility of human freedom, for reasons I adduce and discuss. Human freedom is ambiguous because it can be a source of evils, and sometimes demonic evils, as human history forcefully demonstrates. But human freedom lies at the heart of what it means or can mean to be a responsible person. It is thus a highly desirable capability, despite the acknowledged ambiguities to which it can and does inevitably give rise.

I bolster my defense of this-worldly religion with discussion of three prominent examples of it in the continuing history of various types of religious faith. The first is a defense of *pantheism* mounted by the German Protestant theologian of the nineteenth century Friedrich Schleiermacher; the second is *Daoism*; and the third is the versions of *religious naturalism* that have come to the fore—especially in the United States—in recent years. These three outlooks are both deeply religious and firmly world-affirming. Their affirmation of this world, with all of its ambiguous realities and possibilities, does not demarcate them as secular, meaning that basing the

distinction between religion and secularism on world-denial and world-acceptance respectively, does not meet the test of either critical or historical analysis. Nature as it is can be welcomed, affirmed, celebrated, and loved in the name of religion and fully acknowledged as inherently sacred.

Moreover, such world-affirming religious outlooks can interact with positive secular perspectives on the world in mutually supportive manners. They can do so in ways that world-denying religious perspectives make much more difficult, even to the point of rejecting everything that does not fit into their other-worldly perspectives. Anxious preoccupation with a supposed perfect, non-ambiguous world to come, or intensive search for a present route of escape from the challenges and tribulations of an engaged earthly life, makes world-denying religions unsuitable for extensive interactions with secular cultures and secular worldviews.

In *Chapter 5* I direct attention to the earth-wide ecological crisis of the present century. I discuss here some ways in which religious-minded and secular-minded people and religious and secular institutions can explore and implement ways of responding to the crisis and working together to alleviate its destructive effects. I cite examples of a Protestant Christian leader, an engaged Buddhist center, and a scientist who lays heavy stress on the sacredness of nature's creative processes, exhibiting in these ways how both religious and secular outlooks and resources can be drawn upon in order to elicit awareness of imminent ecological disaster and to motivate urgent resolve to fight against it. With the example of the biologist Stuart Kauffman, I show how both secular scientific and religious convictions can join forces in this fight.

The battle can also be joined for a combination of scientific and moral reasons, as I demonstrate in the case of the biologist E. O. Wilson. I also briefly describe what philosopher Kurt Baier calls *the moral point of view* and call for its extension to nonhuman animals as well as human ones. There are also powerful prudential and aesthetic motivations for acknowledging and seeking ways to counter the threat of environmental disaster in our time. Different reasons and motivations can thus combine, each leading to the similar conclusion of faithful respect for earthly nature's well-being and the resolve to work with passionate conviction for its restoration, repair, and continuing creativity. I emphasize the magnitude and the urgency of structural and institutional transformations—and not just those of individual consciousness and commitment—that lie before us in the face of threatening ecological disaster.

Religion has a definite role to play in this regard, and it can and must join hands with secular outlooks and pursuits to protect and preserve the

ecological home we humans share with all other living creatures. But in order to play this necessary role, religion must be confessedly world-affirming and not morbidly world-ignoring, world-impugning, or world-denying. That it has the proven, effective ability and promise to be the former rather than the latter, and to cooperate fully with the secular aspects and resources of culture for the sake of doing so, is the demonstrable thesis of the fifth chapter

Chapter 6 is devoted to the task of providing an adequate depiction of the distinctive nature of religious faith and of showing in this manner how religion differs from secularism. It also seeks to show how religion and secularism, despite their palpable differences, can draw on their many commonalities of function, belief, and commitment to work together for the integrity and well-being of human society, of all forms of life on earth in their respective ecological niches, and of the inanimate features of the whole earth as well. The chapter acknowledges the many similarities of function that are shared by religious and secular perspectives, but it also highlights the ontological focus and commitment that I argue to be the distinguishing characteristic of religion in its various forms. In concentrating on religion's central ontological commitment, I follow the lead of American philosopher Kevin Schilbrack. But I differ from his interpretation of how this distinctive ontological focus should be described.

What is distinctive about religion as I view it is its preoccupation with the ontological status or role in reality of the *sacred* as religiously conceived and revered. The chapter presents a list of defining traits of the sacred and provides examples of how these traits are exemplified in some of the great world religions and in an indigenous religious culture of North America. In all such cases, the sacred is believed to have a central, dominant, pervasive ontological status and not just to be an imagined ideal. Secular outlooks, in contrast, are not marked by this distinctive ontological focus, either professedly or implicitly. The latter may have ontological commitments that differ from the sacred as I describe it. These commitments can be explicit or implicit.

In spite of this critical difference between religious and secular forms of faith, there are many areas of overlap between them that permit of shared projects, endeavors, and concerns of many kinds. The two are not so much opposed to one another in all areas of thought and practice as different from one another in one crucial respect. Religion turns on an explicit ontology of the sacred, while secular outlooks do not. But this difference permits many overlaps of mutual appreciation, awareness, and conviction. These overlaps should be exploited and implemented to the maximum degree rather than being ignored or minimized by either side.

This statement anticipates the topic and concern of *chapter 7*, which is the pressing need for reconciliation of sacred and secular views of the world. In this chapter I explore some earlier meanings of the term *secular*, noting how the term came eventually to stand outside of, rather than being included within, the specific orbit of religion. I discuss the concept of the secular state, showing how it has mainly been designed to be neutral with regard to distinctively religious traditions, institutions, practices, and beliefs, thus allowing each of them to flourish unimpeded by the state. The seventeenth-century philosopher John Locke's argument is brought into play in this regard. Locke observed that honest religious piety cannot be commanded or enforced by the state because a person can only be freely invited and persuaded to have sincere religious convictions of any kind.

To think otherwise, as states with a particular established religious institution could be construed to think and are so construed by Locke, especially in light of the religious violence of the Thirty Years' War and of other disruptive and destructive religious conflicts of recent memory in his own time, is to make these states encouragers and supporters of personal hypocrisy, dishonesty, and insincerity when it comes to religious convictions. It is also to give states with an established religion incentive and sanction for wars against states with different established religions. A religiously neutral or secular state should therefore be seen as a champion of religious freedom and of genuine, freely chosen religious faith, and not as being opposed to religion.

This is one of the principal ways in which secularism and religion can be seen as cooperating with and assisting one another—in keeping with the main theme of this chapter. I contrast this approving view of religious neutrality on the part of states with the claim by ultra-conservative religious thinkers in the United States today who claim that the country has always constituted itself as a Christian state and that it should continue to strive to act and be regarded as such. This view not only founders on historical grounds; it is opposed to a central motto of the United States, namely, *E pluribus unum* (out of many, one). The “many” in this case is the plurality of religious outlooks and traditions brought to its shores that are allowed free rein to be cherished and practiced in the United States. The “one” is the consensus about fundamental political and policy principles of nationhood that can be drawn upon by religious as well as secular persons where neither is allowed to usurp or dominate the other.

In the pursuit of further clarification of the nature of religion, a clarification that is needed if we are properly to perceive the differences between religious and secular outlooks, I take issue in this chapter with the

idea that religious faith can be accurately described as the state of being ultimately concerned with whatever is believed to be ontologically ultimate. This conception of the nature of religious faith was endorsed by the German-American theologian Paul Tillich. I note that secular people may also have versions of faith that turn on assumed ontological ultimates, and I describe some of these other kinds of ultimate commitment. Thus, it is not mere ultimacy that characterizes the object of distinctively religious faith. Instead, it is the ontological *ultimacy of the sacred* that accurately defines the object of religious faith, the sacred being understood as I describe it in chapter 6.

Proponents of religious and secular kinds of faith are not thereby cut off from meaningful and fruitful dialogue. They can have much to learn from one another's different perspective on the world. But they can only do so with attitudes of openness, receptivity, and humility on both sides. Their differences are not to be discounted in such ongoing encounters and conversations. Were there no significant differences, there would be little to learn from their dialogues. Attempts to downplay or ignore all of the differences would mean an attitude of condescension on either side, a failure to take seriously the strength of conviction on the two sides. Honest and effective ongoing dialogue between those holding religious and secular views, or among disputants of strictly religious persuasions, or among those of strictly secular persuasion, does not require an outlook of epistemological relativism. Instead, it requires an outlook of convictional openness, where convictions as well as receptivity to opposing points of view are respected and given their due. All such disputants, after all, live in a common world and must find ways to cooperate with and learn from one another in the world.

I therefore strongly encourage in this chapter the need for persistent, ongoing interaction and dialogue among religious and secular people and their respective commitments and traditions of thought. Their intersections of agreement can be a basis for their explorations of areas of disagreement in a spirit of honest, open-minded investigation. Having the disagreements brought out into the open can have two important effects. It can make the participants in dialogue more fully conscious of the nature of their disagreements, and it can also invite shared investigations into assumptions and reasons underlying the disagreements. Effective critical thought can thus be encouraged on both sides, with a possible widening and deepening of each perspective.

It is one thing to have assumptions about which we may not be fully aware. It is another to bring them to the surface and subject them to

shared critical analysis. Such an approach can lessen the disparities between religious and secular outlooks and broaden their areas of possible agreement and common effort. Honesty and humility are required on both sides of such dialogues if they are to have their desired effects. The point applies to religious participants in such dialogues as much as it does to secular ones when the two are brought into conversation. Blind, unthinking, adamant opposition of the one to the other, and the attempt to impose the one on the other, miss the chance of much to be gained from their mutual sharing and willing cooperation. Neither side is capable of having all of the truth needed for dealing with life in a perilous world, and neither side is in possession of some infallible, unrevisable basis for the truths it claims. The sacred and the secular are complementary to one another in numerous ways rather than being necessarily opposed to one another.

Opposition to this irenic view comes markedly from two opposed sides at present, that of the vehement, anti-religious, scientistic secularism of thinkers like Richard Dawkins and influenced and represented by the logical positivism of the early twentieth century, on the one side, and that of the ultraconservative Christians who insist on the infallibility of their Bible in all areas of thought and practice, on the other. I mention the latter but do not go into detail in discussing it. But I devote some concerted attention to the former, showing how both Dawkins and the positivists exhibit an attitude of close-minded intolerance when it comes to all things religious.

I criticize these kinds of stark opposition between religion and secularity, seeing them as narrow, uninformed, lacking interest in being better informed, and destructive of the need for both sides to be brought into useful and necessary relationship with the other. Each has perspectives, values, and commitments from which the other has much to learn and gain. Each deserves full recognition, respect, and acceptance in a just, peaceful, well-ordered society. In order for this crucial open-spirited and open-minded posture to be cultivated and maintained, it is important that we continue to reflect on and aspire to do justice to the respective natures and roles of religion and secularism, to their significant differences as well as their important areas of overlap and common concern. This is the major thesis I defend in this book.

Chapter 8 is devoted to discussion of the relations between a particular kind of theistic view and a religious naturalist view of the world, and of the place of humans in the world. The theistic view is that of Christian author Diana Butler Bass, and the naturalistic one is that of professor of physics Chet Raymo. These two writers are tantalizingly close to one another's basic

religious commitments, despite the fact that Bass gives a prominent place to God in the articulation of her outlook, while Raymo does not. However, the focus of both of them is intensively on the here-and-now natural world rather than on some kind of supernatural realm. It is also the case that each, in her or his distinctive fashion, exhibits a profound level of respect for and a ready openness to interaction with secular worldviews.

Bass locates God squarely in the natural world rather than in some kind of supernatural heaven, and Raymo draws primarily on the secular discipline of physics and other natural sciences in maintaining the same focus on the natural world. Bass's concept of God's *character*, in contrast with her passionate insistence on God's *location* in the world, is left vague—so much so in fact as to bring her theology extremely close to Raymo's religious naturalism. In consequence, both of their views, while explicitly and emphatically religious in their insistence on the presence of the ontological sacred throughout nature, are also warnings against restricting the scope and character of religious faith in general to its more familiar historical forms.

Religion need be no more fixed or unalterable in its fundamental modes of development and expression than is secular culture. Both can face toward the future and not just be frozen in the past. Each can fruitfully influence the other in the present, as can easily be shown always to have been true, whether explicitly or implicitly, in the past. Religion and secularism are aspects of the same cultural system at any given time, and each aspect needs to be given its due. To set them sharply and permanently against one another is to be guilty of regrettable close-mindedness and opacity of outlook. They are demonstrably not the same, but they should also not be set in complete opposition to one another. The two authors focused on in this final chapter make this lesson apparent in eloquent and persuasive detail.

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