

**L. Scott Smith**<sup>1</sup>  
Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi  
United States of America

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## **AN UNSTEADY ‘WALL OF SEPARATION’: A FEW CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Abstract**

This is a polemical essay concerning the ‘wall of separation’ between church and state in the United States of America. The author observes that there is a political struggle between defenders of religion, primarily Christians, on the one hand, and secularists on the other. Typical reasons given by secularists for the separation between church and state, and/or religion and politics, are historical, constitutional, and cultural. The author vigorously argues that these reasons are doubtful and unconvincing. More significant than any of these, however, is the idea that ‘faith’ is cognitively inferior to ‘knowledge’ and therefore has no place in public discourse. The author explores in further detail the putative epistemological distinctions between faith and knowledge, and contends that these too are far from convincing.

**Keywords:** separation of Church and State, Thomas Jefferson, Christianity, epistemology, USA

The ‘wall of separation’ is a metaphor with a rich history. From the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, we see it in the writings of luminaries such as Anglican priest and theologian Richard Hooker, Puritan Roger Williams, and British Whig James Burgh, each of whom appropriated it in a manner to suit his own distinctive concerns and purposes, as diverse as they were.<sup>2</sup> Thomas Jefferson revived it at the beginning of the succeeding century, in which it was thereafter used by other persons and groups in various ways. It is highly doubtful that the meaning attached to the metaphor by any of these was that of a ‘godless’ public life. Yet as its meaning has evolved in America, it is now, in most quarters, identified with an aggressive, secular spirit, hostile to all religion and most especially to Christianity. The ‘wall of separation’ may reasonably be viewed as a line of demarcation between two antipodal forces in American public life, each militating against the other. It is scarcely an exaggeration to declare that the United States public square resembles, in many noteworthy respects, a war zone,

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1 L. Scott Smith is a public intellectual, who holds a Ph.D. in philosophy of religion from Columbia University (New York), and has taught philosophy courses at Texas A & M – Corpus Christi and at Del Mar College, which is located in the same city. E-mail: LSSesq114@aol.com

2 See: Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State*, Harvard University Press, 2002, pp. 21-64.

in which peace is at best ephemeral, continually giving way to firefights. Instead of a struggle with rifles and bayonets, the combatants engage in skirmishes over ideas, the foundational one being the place, if any, of religion and God in public life. Intellectual historian Wilfred M. McClay describes the perspective on each side in the following manner: "Defenders of religion see an aggressive, arrogant, and all-but-triumphant secularism, which controls academe, the media, and the federal courts, and thereby largely controls public discourse. Secularists and their allies see in their opponents an incipient religious reaction, a dangerous cultural regression, and a 'return of the repressed' that would obliterate scientific inquiry and demolish individual liberty, and take us back to the Middle Ages."<sup>3</sup>

Declaring that the bone of contention in this inimical exchange is the public role of religion, while technically correct, may constitute an excessively glib description of the matter. Far more than an academic issue is involved, since the victors determine the appearance, shape, and texture of the nation's political and social fabric. This is because religion is not, nor has it ever been, a peripheral or insular concern. It lies at the heart of culture, affecting all the ties that bind a nation together, providing the context for its fact-finding and truth-telling, and profoundly influencing the habits, traditions, and social mores of its citizens. Deep chasms of disagreement between citizens regarding religion and its role in society invariably result in concomitant differences between their understandings of the good life, their interpretations of history, and even their views of the arts and sciences.

Secularists understand religion as a medieval, reactive, and destructive force, which, to paraphrase John Stuart Mill, caters to the most perverse tendencies in human nature and therefore poses a threat to enlightened governance.<sup>4</sup> Their insistence upon a wall between church and state amounts to more than preserving the respective integrity of religious and state institutions by safeguarding each from encroachment by the other. They advocate instead a full and complete separation of religion from politics and every other segment of public life. Many like John Rawls support a 'public reason'<sup>5</sup> that banishes religious explanation from public discourse. Since the Immigration Reform Act of 1965 threw open the doors of immigration in America and brought forth from the Third World millions of newcomers from various cultural and religious backgrounds, the cacophonous sounds of competing religions have strengthened the secularist call for a high and impregnable wall of separation between religious and public concerns, thus increasing the demand for a 'naked public square.'<sup>6</sup>

Defenders of religion in America, especially nativist Christians, believe that

3 Wilfred M. McClay, "Two Concepts of Secularism", in: *Religion Returns to the Public Square*, Hugh Heclo and Wilfred M. McClay (eds.), Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington D.C., 2003, p. 41.

4 See: Samuel Gregg, John Stuart Mill's Intolerant Faith and the Religion of Liberalism, *Public Discourse: The Journal of the Witherspoon Institute*, June 19, 2017, available at: <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2017/06/19529/> (accessed September 4, 2019).

5 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Columbia University Press, pp. 212-254. See also: L. Scott Smith, Does the Idea of God Belong in Politics? A Response to the 'Political Liberalism' of John Rawls, *Politics and Religion Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2018, pp. 265-284.

6 See: Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids 1984.

they are being treated condescendingly as second-class citizens, with their voices falling on deaf ears. They resent the governing elite as those who would readily be their authoritarian masters, and are convinced that public institutions, which their tax dollars support, especially the institutions of government and education, do not reflect or advance the ideas and values they cherish. They see themselves as participants in an undeclared war to take back their country.

As America approaches the third decade of the twenty-first century, there is little optimism in either camp that the nation's Constitution will provide a political and social framework in which the combatants may herald a truce and work together for the common good. Constitutional scholar Robert A. Dahl spells out the reason for this darkening hope, writing that 'in the end a democratic country cannot depend on its constitutional systems for the preservation of its liberties. It can depend only on the beliefs and cultures shared by its political, legal, and cultural elites and by the citizens to whom these elites are responsive.'<sup>7</sup> His point is that a cultural consensus underlies democratic institutions, which are in turn predicated upon it. If Samuel P. Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' underscores a single truth, it is that religion, always and everywhere, is the entelechy of culture.<sup>8</sup> It spawns culture, which determinatively shapes the prevailing constitutional system. Hence, a growing concern is that broad disagreement concerning the religious dimension of American public culture may eventually dissolve the consensus, or binding ties, that render its constitutional government possible.

Although a secularist attitude critical of Christianity presently pervades most of the public institutions of the United States, the reasons appear to lack an intellectual edge. As the 'wall of separation' continues to be subjected to close critical scrutiny, it is displaying deep, unsightly cracks. The footings supporting it have loosened and are gradually becoming unearthed. What appears at the moment is a high but unsteady, debilitated structure, the justification for which is increasingly difficult to understand, much less to defend.

In this essay, I will attempt to explain some of the reasons why the secularist ideology of separation has worn thin and why the 'wall of separation' between church and state, which as the mantra of secularists is no longer informative or helpful as an instrument of public policy.

### **Historical, Constitutional, and Cultural Considerations**

Columbia University law professor Philip Hamburger meticulously uncovers the checkered history of the separation of church and state, pointing out that the

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7 Robert A. Dahl, *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?*, Yale University Press, 2003, p. 99.

8 See: Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, New York, 1996, p. 47, where the author states that 'Religion is a central defining characteristic of civilizations and, as Christopher Dawson said, "the great religions are the foundations on which the great civilizations rest."' Also see Christopher Dawson, *Religion and Culture*, The Catholic University Press of America, Washington, D.C., 2013, p. 16, where he states, '[T]he world religions have been the keystones of the world cultures, so that when they are removed the arch falls and the building is destroyed.'

idea was scarcely evidenced in colonial America and was not intended to shape the contours of the nation's public life.<sup>9</sup> He further observes that the doctrine during the first half of the nineteenth century came into its own as a shibboleth for Protestant nativists, who used it as an instrument of anti-Catholic discrimination.<sup>10</sup> Hamburger's groundbreaking work does nothing to bolster the secularist argument that gradually swept over the country during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that made the establishment clause of the First Amendment virtually synonymous with the doctrine of separation. His work serves to portray the doctrine as largely one of political extremists and propagandists.

American University professor of public affairs Daniel L. Dreisbach likewise carefully examines one of the most sacrosanct texts frequently relied upon by secularists to bolster separation. The text is, of course, none other than Thomas Jefferson's famous letter to the Baptists of Danbury, Connecticut, wherein he refers to the First Amendment's erection of 'a wall between church and state.' Dreisbach explains that the letter was never meant as fodder to support a secular public square, but constitutes Jefferson's comment upon federalism, intending to show not only that the Virginian was a friend of religion and of the rights of conscience, but to demonstrate also his resolute conviction that the New England clergy's 'ultimate ambition' of establishing a national church was unconstitutional.<sup>11</sup> Dreisbach concludes 'there is little evidence that Jefferson thought this figure of speech expressed a universal principle, encapsulated the most salient features of his church-state views, or was his definitive word on the First Amendment.'<sup>12</sup> It is helpful to remember in this connection that his 'Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom' in Virginia,<sup>13</sup> enacted by the State's Assembly in 1785, did not, nor was it ever proposed to, promote a secular public square. Its projected purpose was simply to disestablish the practice of religion by outlawing tax assessments for the benefit of it. Nonestablishment and separation are different ideas, which ought not to be uncritically conflated.

As in the State of Virginia, establishments of religion, both before and after ratification of the United States Constitution, were common. Many States supported one or more religious groups.<sup>14</sup> Yet taxpayer discontent mounted, and its fulminating force eradicated many, if not most, of the establishments prior to the Civil War. After the War, in 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment was enacted, which included, in part, provisions guaranteeing to each citizen due process and equal

9 Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* . . . p. 53.

10 Ibidem, pp. 193, 201, 220.

11 Daniel L. Dreisbach, *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation Between Church and State*, New York University Press, 2002, pp. 28, 42, 50.

12 Ibidem, p. 54.

13 Thomas Jefferson, "A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom", in: *Toward Benevolent Neutrality: Church, State, and the Supreme Court*, Robert T. Miller and Ronald B. Flowers (eds.), Markham Press Fund, Waco, 1987, p. 584.

14 John R. Vile, "Established Churches in Early America", in: *The First Amendment Encyclopedia*, available at <https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/801/established-churches-in-early-america>, (accessed September 4, 2019).

protection of the law. In time, the United States Supreme Court would capitalize upon these broad provisions in order to reach into the various States and to administer deathblows to numerous traditional public expressions of religion.

Justice Hugo Black delivered the first fateful blow. The doctrine of separation had never been a staple of First Amendment establishment theory before he wrote the majority opinion in *Everson v. Board of Education*.<sup>15</sup> When reading his opinion, as well as the ruling opinions in many of the other high Court cases that followed it, especially *Lemon v. Kurtzman*<sup>16</sup> and its progeny, one must wonder on what plausible historical basis the Court advanced its view. Justice Black's invocation of Thomas Jefferson's metaphor was uninformed and illegitimate. There was not the slightest evidence that the third president ever advocated applying the separationist doctrine within the States themselves or to every vestige of religion in the nation's public life. Justice Black's interpretation of Jefferson's metaphor was, at best, a glaring misreading of history and, at worst, a gratuitous effort to impose upon the American people, by force of law, a political position that the justice and his brethren favored. It ought not escape notice that Justice Black, who prior to taking his seat on the Court was a member of the Ku Klux Klan, referred to his *Everson* opinion as a 'Pyrrhic victory'<sup>17</sup> for Roman Catholics. His use of Jefferson's metaphor contained at least a flicker of the same anti-Catholic ideology with which nativist Protestants were imbued a century earlier.

The wall, as Justice Black and his colleagues interpreted it, could very well serve as a vehicle by which to strike down religious references in the nation's motto, its Pledge of Allegiance, and its Inaugural ceremonies, as well as in numerous other segments of the nation's public life, including religious portrayals and references on countless murals and monuments throughout the reaches of government. Yet the Court, as the unheralded third political arm of government, understood that rigid separation, if consistently applied, would surely inflame public sentiment against it. In an unprincipled nod toward pragmatic power politics, the Court modified its secularist ideology as circumstances dictated, formulating other less provocative approaches to the matter.<sup>18</sup>

The die has nonetheless been cast in education. Public schools, including state colleges and universities, continue to be barred from anything suggesting the slightest hint of devotional religion. Invocations at academic events are, whenever possible, avoided, and when not, are then offered without reference to deity or to any other distinctive core of religious principle or belief. This atmosphere in schools is puzzling considering that the Christian religion has been the

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15 *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1 (1947).

16 *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602 (1971).

17 Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* . . . p. 462.

18 See *Marsh v. Chambers*, 463 U.S. 783 (1983), opting for a historical approach, and *Elk Grove Unified School District v. Newdow*, 542 U.S. 1, 4-10 (2004), a "sidestep and avoid" strategy. Also see: L. Scott Smith, *America Unraveling*, Father's Press, Lee's Summit, 2008, pp. 133-142.

most formative building block of Western civilization, including the founding of colleges and universities and other institutions of learning. The reality is that the Christian faith built Western civilization by its vast inroads into not only science and technology, but also mathematics, international and Western law, morality, art and architecture, and philanthropy and charity.<sup>19</sup> The rigorous logic of Christian scholasticism was, as Alfred North Whitehead explains, the necessary prelude to the advances of modern science, but this fact is one scarcely mentioned within American education.<sup>20</sup> Likewise unmentioned is the fact advanced by historian Rodney Stark that Christianity's rational conception of God gave birth to the West's scientific, technological, and economic dominance.<sup>21</sup> Of course, without surprise, many of the thinkers who blazed the path of Western achievement were themselves committed Christians. Perhaps the foremost among them was a celebrated contemporary of Isaac Newton, chemist Robert Boyle who, according to historian Steven Shapin, 'arguably entered more facts in the register of the seventeenth century English experimental community than any other individual.' Boyle treasured 'truth-telling' as demonstrating nobility of the soul, and labored meticulously in experiments to show objectivity and disinterest.<sup>22</sup> He was a Christian who reinforced, as no other figure of his time, the credibility of scientific pursuit by his reverence for truth.<sup>23</sup> All the foregoing contributions of the Christian faith lie hidden within a cloud of what some interpret as academic obscurantism, advanced and maintained by an aggressive secularist temper, continually given renewed impetus by the elitist attitudes of the Supreme Court.

### The Epistemological Consideration

The foregoing considerations demonstrate that drawing a bold line of demarcation between religion and American public life is problematic. Notwithstanding the gnawing questions that these considerations engender, the wall of separation remains upright. The practical explanation for this fact concerns the manner in which the nature of religious claims themselves is presented. They are propositions of *faith*, which is widely regarded as tantamount to opinion. The nation's public institutions should not, so the contention goes, uncritically accommodate or cater to superstitious or mythological claims and ideas. It is the alleged cognitive status of faith, as opposed to knowledge, that keeps the wall of separation in place no matter how unjustified it may otherwise be on historical, constitutional, and cultural grounds. As philosophy professor Dallas Willard

19 Thomas E. Woods, Jr., *How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization*, Regnery Publishing, Inc., Washington D.C., 2005, p. 1. Woods centers his attention upon the contributions of the Roman Catholic Church, but the idea of the Christian faith as the primary formative influence upon Western civilization is unmistakable in his treatment.

20 Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, The Free Press, New York, (1925) 1967, pp. 12-13.

21 Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, Random House Trade Paperbacks, New York, 2006, pp. x-xiii, 37-43, 120.

22 Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*, The University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp. 126, 161.

23 *Ibidem*, pp. 149, 168, 175, 191.

insightfully observes, 'If it were seriously imagined that the teachings of Christianity or other religions constituted a vital and irreplaceable knowledge of reality, there would be no more talk of the separation of church and state than there is of the separation of chemistry or economics and state.'<sup>24</sup>

Make no mistake about it: government policy gurus, university professors, and virtually all leaders in American industry take pride in the assumption that they are involved in the pursuit and application of 'knowledge.' Conventional wisdom correlates knowledge with fact, and distinguishes fact from fiction. Those who publicly propose ideas that cannot be definitively supported by fact are considered to traverse in opinion or belief, which is by definition suspect and possesses limited cachet. Since religion demands, in the words of Yale University professor and self-proclaimed secularist Anthony T. Kronman, 'dogmatic assumptions' and a 'sacrifice of the intellect,' faith is not only a matter of narrow and inflexible belief, but is also entirely unsuited to aid students in their discovery of 'the meaning of life.'<sup>25</sup> Christian theologians and ethicists are, for these reasons, typically not provided a seat at the round table of knowledge. The message conveyed by the wall of separation is 'that what religion teaches is not a matter of knowledge of reality.'<sup>26</sup> Willard's point is that divorcing the Christian faith from knowledge appears a way to relegate its beliefs to political and social irrelevance.

The burden of proof is, of course, upon secularists to show, in a definitive manner, why faith is cognitively inferior to knowledge. In addressing this issue, it would seem incumbent upon them first to explain what 'knowledge' is. If their efforts to define it render no consensus, then their contention that faith does not rise to the level of knowledge places them in a disconcerting situation. While they may argue that faith is not knowledge and is inferior to it, they must also admit that there is no definable consensus regarding what knowledge is, whereupon their argument founders. Although it is true that a single person may be convinced that a particular theory of knowledge spells out reasons for contrasting it to faith, the point is that the theory must be widely accepted by others, since the view of only a single person or group constitutes an insufficient basis upon which to establish public policy affecting everyone. If democratic leaders implement a negative policy regarding the public role of religion, and do so in the absence of broad scale approval by the governed, then the leaders' policy is an unjustified political imposition, interpreted by adversely affected elements as tyrannous. To phrase the matter another way, if secularists fail to explain the nature of knowledge in a way that commands broad public acceptance, it is impossible for them to argue that faith is inferior to it. The wall between religion and American public life will then prove as doubtful epistemologically as it is on other grounds.

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24 Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge*, Harper One, New York, 2010, p. 32.

25 Anthony T. Kronman, *Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life*, Yale University Press, 2007, pp. 198-200, 244.

26 Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge...* p. 32.

Some secularists may tend to equate knowledge with truth, but this is obviously a naïve position to take. A gambler, for example, may truthfully declare that he will throw snake eyes in a game of craps, but no one would dare argue that his declaration arises to the level of knowledge. Knowledge, as Plato taught, must include an element in addition to true belief.<sup>27</sup>

So we may assume that our secularists will seek immediate leave to amend their definition of knowledge by stating that it is '*justified* true belief.' This is an internalist concept of knowledge that most people have imbibed with their mother's milk, or at least from the time John Locke explained justification in foundational, deontological, and evidential terms. For him, a belief, to be regarded as knowledge, must be either basic (foundational), i.e., self-evident, incorrigible (concerning the contents of one's own mind), or obvious to the senses, or it must be derived deductively or inductively from evidentially supported propositions.<sup>28</sup> As influential as Locke's theory of knowledge proved to be, it is not a safe refuge for secularists advocating separation. The theory is laden with difficulties. First, it is self-contradictory because there is no acceptable evidence by which to commend the theory itself as knowledge. Second, there are numerous propositions generally accepted as knowledge with little or no evidential support, such as that the past influences the future, that the laws of physics will remain the same, that we can trust our minds, that there are other minds, and that there is an external world. Third, and perhaps most damaging still, are so-called 'Gettier cases,'<sup>29</sup> which demonstrate that justified true belief may rest upon false evidential premises.

Our secularists are again quick to request leave to amend their definition. They desire now to jettison all internalist requirements while adding externalist ones. They decide, in other words, to relinquish the elements of justification and evidential support in their theory, while contending that knowledge requires only true beliefs arising in the appropriate way from experience. The eighteenth century Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid emphasizes that properly functioning faculties render true belief and that, if a cognitive demon is actively deluding us so that we cannot rely upon these faculties, then there exists no acceptable explanation why we should bother trusting in our senses and attempting to reason at all.<sup>30</sup> Plantinga powerfully argues that warrant for a belief implies that it is produced by cognitive faculties functioning properly, in accordance with a design plan aimed at truth, and in an appropriate epistemic environment.<sup>31</sup> The funda-

27 Plato, "Theaetetus", in: *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, trans. with commentary by Francis M. Cornford, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., New York, 1957, p. 158.

28 For a helpful analysis of John Locke's theory of knowledge, see: Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 75-88. Charles Sanders Peirce later added "abductive" reasoning. Ibidem, pp. 86-87.

29 Edmund Gettier, *Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?*, available at: <http://fitelson.org/proseminar/gettier.pdf>, (accessed September 4, 2019).

30 Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, Derek R. Brookes (ed.), The Pennsylvania State University Press, (1776) 2000, pp. 24, 32, 37, 61.

31 Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*. . . pp. xii, 156.



mental objection to externalism is that one is ignorant of whether the belief-forming process is reliable and thus has no assurance that his or her beliefs are really knowledge. The issue is that, although the externalist possesses information, it is a leap to equate that information with knowledge. Our senses inform us that the earth is flat with an overarching sky and that the sun is the sole giver of light at noon.<sup>32</sup> It is difficult to make a convincing argument that what our cognitive faculties render in every case constitutes, without an additional element or elements, knowledge.

Defining knowledge, whether by way of internalist or externalist requirements, may prove too precarious an endeavor to allow secularists to advocate a wall dividing matters of faith and knowledge. So they may succumb to the lure of skepticism, heeding the nod of thinkers such as David Hume and Keith Lehrer.<sup>33</sup> The underlying problem with skepticism is that it too is self-contradictory. Skeptics assume that we *know* that we do not know or, in Lehrer's case, that we *know* that we do not know that we do not know. In order to be illuminating, skepticism must disclose at least some kernel of purported knowledge; otherwise, it is nothing but a profession of ignorance. Secularists who find this avenue tempting to travel will eventually be compelled to admit that, since they doubt the truth of all propositions and believe knowledge does not exist, there is no epistemological reason to separate propositions of faith from those of purported knowledge.

Yet it remains undisputed that the negative assessment of religious faith has had a triumphant reign in the West since the Enlightenment. Immanuel Kant's treatment of the difference between faith and knowledge is much more carefully nuanced than most of those who preceded him. The great Königsberger is a watershed figure that drew a bold, critical line between 'thinking' and 'knowing'.<sup>34</sup> Faith was apparently about thinking, since he states that he found it necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith.<sup>35</sup> He holds that genuine theoretical knowledge contains a manifold of sense impressions,<sup>36</sup> which constitutes one of his main debts to Hume. This manifold is ordered by a priori categories of the understanding.<sup>37</sup> Since the ideas of God, freedom, immortality, and purpose are not accompanied by any particular component of sense, they have no status as theoretical knowledge and thus serve at best as regulative ideas or, in the practical realm, as those shaping the moral life.<sup>38</sup>

32 See: Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, The Free Press, New York, (1933) 1967, p. 155.

33 See: Louis P. Pojman, *The Theory of Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, 1993, pp. 31-40, 48-55, particularly the selections from the writings of Hume and Lehrer.

34 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, St. Martin's Press, New York, (1787) 1965, p. 27.

35 *Ibidem*, p. 29.

36 *Ibidem*, pp. 155-156.

37 *Ibidem*, p. 147.

38 *Ibidem*, pp. 550-551. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck, The Liberal Arts Press, New York, (1788) 1956, pp. 137-139. Regarding 'purpose,' see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard, Hafner Publishing Company, New York, (1790) 1968, pp. 265-266, 285-286.

So far-reaching was Kant's influence that Christian thinkers succeeding him sought to craft a justification for faith divorced from knowledge. The seminal Friedrich Schleiermacher defined faith as a 'feeling of absolute dependence.'<sup>39</sup> Albrecht Ritschl, another German theologian with immense European influence, tied faith to 'independent value judgments.'<sup>40</sup> Intellectuals as iconic as Soren Kierkegaard and William James spoke of faith in voluntaristic terms as 'a leap'<sup>41</sup> or as 'the will to believe.'<sup>42</sup> Twentieth century theologians, such as Rudolf Bultmann<sup>43</sup> and Paul Tillich,<sup>44</sup> respectively defined faith as self-understanding or ultimate concern. Living in Kant's shadow and under his influence, these and other thinkers failed to contest the dichotomy between faith and knowledge. This failure resulted in faith's being regarded as a mere subjective preference, notwithstanding the fact that Christianity had been and was Western civilization's most formative influence.

When we look closely at Kant's view of 'knowledge,' we observe that it does not comport with precisely what we see in knowledge. There has been an unsettling realization since Kant lived that empirical knowledge is not immutably certain, but subject to changing paradigms. The physical world with which Kant was familiar was the one envisioned by Isaac Newton. Edwin Arthur Burt describes that world as follows: "Space was identified with the realm of geometry, time with the continuity of number... The really important world outside was a world hard, cold, colourless, silent, and dead; a world of quantity, a world of mathematically computable motions in mechanical regularity. The world of qualities as immediately perceived by man became just a curious and quite minor effect of that infinite machine beyond."<sup>45</sup>

Kant's theory of knowledge depended for its inspiration squarely upon Newton's rigidly deterministic and mechanistic physics. Kant did not foresee that, in the twentieth century, Newton's worldview would become passé and yield to one of 'indeterminacy, alternative, and chance as real aspects of the fundamental nature of things, and not merely [as] the consequence of our inadequate and provisional understanding.'<sup>46</sup> How knowledge might be defined in an uncertain world, as the one that quantum mechanics envisions, is a question the celebrated philosopher never possessed the prescience to ask. Yet his distinction between knowing and thinking, while established upon what is now an obsolete worldview, dies hard.

39 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. and trans. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart, Harper & Row, New York, 1963, pp. 1-5.

40 Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, Reference Book Publishers, Inc., Clifton (1888) 1966, pp. 254-255.

41 Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, ed. and trans. H.V.Hong and E.H. Hong, Princeton University Press, (1846) 1992, pp. 11-12, 102, 113.

42 William James, *Essays on Faith and Morals*, R. B. Perry (ed.), The World Publishing Company, New York, (1896) 1962, p. 32.

43 Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1958, pp. 73-77.

44 Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1957, p. 1.

45 Edwin Arthur Burt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*, Doubleday Anchor Books, Garden City, 1954, p. 239.

46 William G. Pollard, *Chance and Providence*, Charles Scriber's Sons, New York, 1958, pp. 54-55.

Newtonianism is not the only pillar of knowledge that has been supplanted by a subsequent conceptual scheme. Whereas Kant's view of the world was inspired by Newton's physics, Sigmund Freud's understanding of the human psyche was based, even if unwittingly, upon Kant's view of knowledge.<sup>47</sup> Freud regarded his new 'science' of libidinal energy as a Copernican event. His doctrinaire intolerance for others' views, such as those of Alfred Adler and Carl Jung, was palpable. Yet Louis Breger, one of Freud's biographers and a psychoanalyst in his own right, questions his subject's 'discovery' of the so-called 'Oedipal complex,' and believes that Freud simply 'invented' the idea.<sup>48</sup> Psychiatrist Judith Herman, similarly, argues that Freud came to understand the trauma of incest as mere 'fantasy' because the countervailing possibility that there might actually be an epidemic of incest in Viennese society was too outrageous and socially unacceptable for him to contemplate.<sup>49</sup> Few psychotherapists today would subscribe to Freud's obviously debunked theory of 'penis-envy.'<sup>50</sup> His psychology, once regarded as a science, is viewed askance today by many.

Numerous disquieting questions also continue to be raised about Darwin's 'dangerous idea,'<sup>51</sup> although doing so by an aspiring professor is almost certain to result in a denial of tenure. Yet acclaimed philosopher and historian of science David Berlinski explains that, within nature, there is radical individuality, oddness, quirkiness, and 'just plain weirdness.' He observes that 'the male red-back spider... , for example, is often consumed during copulation.'<sup>52</sup> The spider passes 'from ecstasy to extinction in the course of one and the same act.' One wonders what conceivable advantage this act might confer upon the male red-back spider's survival, since he is essentially committing suicide. In the same way, it has long been noted that the extant fossil record exhibits only a paucity of intermediate animals contrary to Darwin's prediction. In addition, most animal phyla appeared during a brief moment of geological time and therefore suggest a radical leap in nature, which Darwin roundly denied. It often appears that contemporary Darwinism is immune to falsification notwithstanding the evidence marshaled against it. If nonfalsification is characteristic of religious statements (as it is in particular cases), then it is amusing to reflect upon distinguished biologist Lynn Margulis's prediction that history will adjudge Darwinian theory as simply 'a minor twentieth-century religious sect within the sprawling religious persuasion of Anglo-Saxon biology.'<sup>53</sup> Darwinism, which for now remains a staple of public

47 See: L. Scott Smith, Freud and Adler on Agency and Determinism in the Shaping of the Personality, *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, Vol. 59, No. 3, 2003, pp. 259-263, 270.

48 Louis Breger, *Freud: Darkness in the Midst of Vision*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, 2000, pp. 18, 140.

49 Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, Basic Books, New York, 1997, pp. 13-14.

50 Louis Breger, *Freud: Darkness in the Midst of Vision*... pp. 334, 336-337.

51 Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, Touchstone, New York, 1995.

52 David Berlinski, "The Deniable Darwin", in: *Darwinism, Design, and Public Education*, John Angus Campbell and Steven C. Meyer (eds.), Michigan State University Press, 2003, pp. 157-161.

53 See: Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box*, The Free Press, New York, 1996, p. 26 (quoting Lynn Margulis).

education, does not appear as bulletproof as it once was.

Alfred North Whitehead perceptively points out that, what the history of our search for knowledge underscores, is not a sense of dogmatic certainty or finality as Kant proposed, but at best one of asymptotic progress. He reportedly states in conversation with Lucien Price, "Never swallow anything whole. We live perforce by half-truths and get along fairly well as we do not mistake them for whole-truths, but when we do so mistake them, they raise the devil with us. [Newtonian physics] taught me to beware of certitude. We supposed that, except for a few dark spots which might take a few years to clear up, everything was known about physics, and then, by 1900, it was found that while the Newtonian physics were still a useful and convenient way of looking at things, they were, in any absolute sense, gone."<sup>54</sup>

Dr. Lewis Mehl-Madrona makes a similar observation in the context of his consideration of Darwinism and genetics: "Having followed medical science for more than three decades, I have learned not to take any current pronouncement too seriously since it may well be overturned in a year or two".<sup>55</sup> The point is that our knowledge is mutable, or tentative. When we are convinced that we have discovered it, it is later refined, sometimes beyond recognition. The search for knowledge cannot be explained as the attempt to discover what is absolutely certain. Humanity 'never quite knows what it is after'<sup>56</sup> and sometimes misunderstands what it has found. The dichotomization of beliefs into 'thinking' on the one hand and 'knowing' on the other is myopic and naïve at best.

As one might expect, immense frustration has resulted from the difficulties of defining knowledge. That 'there is knowledge' and that 'it is a valuable commodity' seem to be unavoidable propositions, yet the nature of knowledge escapes our firm grasp. For these reasons, there are those who now urge that knowledge is a matter of social convention. They have attempted to replace the search for knowledge with 'novel descriptions and vocabularies'.<sup>57</sup> Richard Rorty, an influential resource for the postmodern trend in contemporary philosophy, gave up on the idea of 'scientific truth' and substituted for it the desire to re-interpret reason naturalistically as compatible with Nietzsche's Darwinian claim that we are merely 'more complex and sophisticated animals'.<sup>58</sup> Our vocabularies, Rorty claimed, are but tools, which must be evaluated according to how well they allow us to cope with our circumstances. Vocabulary defines reality.

"Take dinosaurs. Once you describe something as a dinosaur its skin color and sex life are causally independent of your having so describe it.

54 *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead*, rec. Lucien Price, Mentor Book, New York, 1954, p. 243.

55 Lewis Mehl-Madrona, *Healing the Mind Through the Power of Story*, Bear & Company, Rochester, 2010, p. 157.

56 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, The Free Press, New York, (1929) 1969, p. 17.

57 See: Sheryar Ookerjee, *Human Reason and Its Enemies*, Promilla & Co., Publishers, Chicago, 2009, p. 238 (quoting Paul O'Grady).

58 Ana Sandoiu, "Too Many Values? Intolerance, Anti-Relativism and Richard Rorty", *Four By Three Magazine*, available at: <https://www.fourbythreemagazine.com/issue/saturation/intolerance-anti-relativism-richard-rorty/>, (accessed September 4, 2019).

But before you describe [something] as a dinosaur, or as anything else, there is no sense to the claim that it is 'out there' having properties... there is no description-independent way the world is, no way it is under no description ...<sup>59</sup>.

Rorty would agree with John Dewey that the quest for certainty is a misguided, vainglorious pursuit. Yet that with which Rorty leaves us is epistemic relativism. Just as vocabularies vary, so does knowledge. Never mind the obvious self-contradiction that Rorty is himself undertaking to impart his (absolute) knowledge of reality to us.

Epistemic relativism leads, as well, to other unsatisfactory, even outrageous, conclusions. Sociologists Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, in an examination of Dr. Jonas Salk's scientific laboratory, sought to show not only that scientific facts are socially constructed, but also that their construction involves the use of devices whereby all traces of production are made extremely difficult to detect. It is almost as if, for the two researchers, scientific endeavor has a surreptitious component. Latour and Woolgar contend, as does Rorty, that splitting an object from the statement that contains it leads to the misconception that scientists are describing an 'out-there-ness.'<sup>60</sup> '[R]eality "out there"... melts back into a statement.'<sup>61</sup> He insists that an important task for all sociologists is 'to show that the construction of reality should not itself be reified.' The following is an example of how Latour's sociological view of things unfolds: when French scientists, who were examining the mummy of Ramses II, who died around 1213 BC, concluded that the ancient Egyptian died of tuberculosis, Latour took issue with them, arguing that Ramses could not have been infected by a bacillus discovered by Robert Koch in 1882. Latour reasoned that, just as it would be an anachronism to say that the pharaoh died of machine-gun fire, it would also be anachronistic to contend that he died of tuberculosis.<sup>62</sup> Not to be overlooked here is that any distinction made by Rorty and Latour between knowledge and faith would be conventional, arbitrary, and subjective. The hope that postmodernism can sustain a firm cognitive distinction between the two is futile, especially since the disagreement is one merely over competing descriptions and vocabularies. How dare secularists engage in the oppressive attempt to impose their own vocabulary (knowledge) upon Christians by purging every vestige of Christianity from the public square. The same consideration tying the hands of secularists also ties those of Christians. So the postmodern approach to knowledge is impotent to resolve the conflict between the two. Since secularists control American politics by the wall separating faith from knowledge, it is they who bear the burden of

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59 Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress, Philosophical Papers*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 3-90.

60 Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*, Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 176-177.

61 *Ibidem*, p. 179.

62 See: Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science*, Picador Press, New York, 1998, pp. 96-97 (quoting Latour).

adducing reasons in defense of it. To this end, postmodernism is no help.

If thinkers from Plato to Rorty have been unable to define knowledge so as to produce a broad and enduring consensus, it seems doubtful that it can be done. Secularists are left attempting to contrast faith with an undefined entity.

### A Postscript

This essay makes no claim that the considerations outlined herein regarding the wall between church and state in America are exhaustive. The claim, instead, is that they are sufficient to raise the suspicion that such a wall of separation cannot be justified by historical, constitutional, cultural, or widely accepted epistemological reasons.

Reading between the lines of this essay one may notice another factor in the equation that rears its head. That factor is none other than a kind of Thrasymachan politics. Michael W. Apple, a touted American professor of education, speaks of the 'politics of official knowledge.'<sup>63</sup> He criticizes those who would not connect education with a sense of politics, for 'educational policy and practice are not simply technical issues, but are inherently political and valuative.'<sup>64</sup> He further explains that it is naïve to think of the school curriculum as neutral knowledge.<sup>65</sup> 'The curriculum begins from the crucial political question, "From whose perspective are we seeing, or reading, or hearing?"' This repoliticizes the issue of what counts as official knowledge, making it subject to critical scrutiny by students, teachers, and others.<sup>66</sup> Knowledge, he insists, is always about power and politics.<sup>67</sup>

There is no more apt explanation than Apple's for why, without any obvious warrant, the Christian religion's treasury of cultural contributions is widely ignored in American public educational institutions, and for why historical texts, especially that of the United States Constitution, have been deconstructed to produce tendentious political outcomes. The fact is that intellectual honesty takes a backseat to the imperatives of a politics in which openness to and vigorous discussion of various points of view are entirely lost.

Defenders of a public role for Christianity would be prudent to heed Professor Apple's pronouncements on the relation between education and politics. His views are a reminder of not only where American public education has been taken, but are also an explanation for why it remains aggressively secular. Those such as Apple have boldly sought to impose their own 'official knowledge' upon public school curricula and have done so under the guise of criticizing 'oppress-

63 Michael W. Apple, *Official Knowledge*, Routledge, New York, 2000, p. 1.

64 Ibidem, p. xii.

65 Ibidem, p. 43.

66 Ibidem, p. 38.

67 Ibidem, p. 43.

sion' by others of differing views. Pursuant to their political agenda, the separation of every vestige of Christianity from the public square remains the goal. This seems a most plausible explanation for why Christianity occupies what seems the unenviable role of pariah in American public life.

No one desires ecclesiastical and governmental institutions to interfere with one another. The question is not whether the United States should be a theocracy. Few are seriously concerned about, much less contending for, this highly improbable prospect. Arguing in this vein is an *ignoratio elenchi*, or nothing but opposition to a strawman. The issue, instead, concerns the shape of American culture, including in part whether controversial secular theories and ideologies will be taught without consideration of competing points of view, whether schoolchildren will be informed of Christianity's immense influence, both positive and negative, upon the Western world, and whether that influence as expressed culturally will be applauded or erased from public cognizance.

Liberalism has wrought many changes. In spite of its positive contributions to Western culture, T. S. Eliot observes that the movement tends to 'release energy rather than accumulate it, to relax rather than to fortify.'<sup>68</sup> It is defined by its point of departure more than its destination, which is 'likely to present a very different picture when arrived at, from the vaguer image formed in imagination.' In the realm of religion, Eliot observes that "Liberalism may be characterized as a progressive discarding of elements in historical Christianity which appear superfluous or obsolete, confounded with practices and abuses which are legitimate objects of attack. But as its movement is controlled rather by its origin than by any goal, it loses force after a series of rejections, and with nothing to destroy is left with nothing to uphold and with nowhere to go".<sup>69</sup>

Liberalism, according to Eliot, ends in chaos, in which the temper, tradition, and will of citizens to advance their own ambitions, as well as the prosperity and prestige of their country, are swept away.

If the current liberal (and secularist) demand for a wall separating the Christian religion from America's public life and institutions cannot be convincingly defended (and it appears doubtful that it can), then it will eventually be seen as little more than a tool of political propaganda and oppression in order to subjugate large portions of the governed. This unfortunate result is sure to tear at the fabric of American culture by alienating millions of citizens from the elite, assuring additional deep-seated conflict and perhaps even the failure of the constitutional system itself.

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68 T. S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture*, Harcourt Brace & Company, New York, (1939) 1976, p. 12.

69 *Ibidem*, pp. 12-13.

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Л. Скот Смит

## НЕСТАБИЛНИ 'ЗИД РАЗДВАЈАЊА': НЕКОЛИКО РАЗМАТРАЊА

### Сажетак

Ово је полемични чланак који се бави „зидом одвајања“ између цркве и државе у Сједињеним Америчким Државама. Аутор анализира политичку борбу између, са једне стране, бранитеља религије, превасходно хришћана, и секулариста са друге стране. Типични аргументи секулариста за јасно и чврсто одвајање цркве и државе, односно религије и политике, су историјски, уставни и културни. Аутор сматра да су ови разлози упитни и да нису претерано уверавајући. Међутим, најважнија идеја која стоји иза ових разлога јесте претпоставка да је вера когнитивно инфериорна знању и да јој као таквој није место у јавној сфери. У овом раду, аутор изазива сваки аспект секуларистичке позиције и детаљно анализира епистемолошке разлике између вере и знања.

**Кључне речи:** одвајање цркве и државе, Томас Џеферсон, хришћанство, епистемологија, САД

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