Editorial

We live in a secular age. Or so we are told. In fact, the real worlds of
society, politics and social and political thought tell a very different
story. Church attendance in many parts of the western world may be
on the wane, but this is balanced by huge increases in church atten-
dance in other parts of the world as well as the global rise of new,
more 'attractive' forms of religious worship. In politics, the secular
project has had, at best, patchy success. The formal separation of
church and state is an outstanding achievement, but it is not always as
clear-cut as may be desirable. This is exemplified by the extent to
which religion forms the basis of most recent political conflicts. The
events of 11 September 2001 and its aftermath in Iraq and elsewhere
is only one example of this phenomenon; it is also an example of the
extent to which religion and other aspects of politics and political
psychology are interwoven. This fact is identified within the long-
standing, if under-represented, position in social and political theory
that points to the religious origins of modern political thought and
agency. In a recent edition of *Theoria*, issue 106 (April 2005), Avishai
Margalit and S. N. Eisenstadt provided compelling arguments in
defense of this position.

   It is with this in mind that the editors of *Theoria* called for contri-
butions towards a special issue on 'The Return of the Sacred'. We
asked for contributions aimed at exploring the relationship between
politics and the sacred, and especially the notion that the sacred is
enjoying an unprecedented revival in contemporary social and politi-
cal theory and practice. The call for papers received a very positive
response and *Theoria* is able to publish two special issues around this
theme. The first issue (*Theoria* 115) was framed around questions of
the relationship between religion and constitutionalism, liberalism
and law and the relationship between theory and the return of the
sacral. In this second special issue, the focus is on broader sociologi-
cal, intellectual historical and theoretical questions. From Hobbes,
via Messianism, McIntyre and Marxism to the context of HIV/AIDS
treatment controversies in South Africa, the main theme here is that,
with sufficient theoretical and historical purview, it is more accurate
to talk of the *persistence*, rather than the *return*, of the sacred.

A number of the 'founding fathers' of the disciplines of sociology and psychology considered religion and religious texts in the development of their theories. This work has tended to be treated as a form of religious studies providing the basis for the development of a secular discipline. Religion is viewed as a phenomenon that is to be studied in order to understand society and social psychology. However, there have been a few writers that have offered what can best be described as religious (and in the case of Freud and Durkheim, specifically Jewish) readings of their work. In 'A Secular Alchemy of Social Science: The Denial of Jewish Messianism in Freud and Durkheim', Philip Wexler takes this work further and presents a reading of the work of two central figures of modern social theory that locates their work within not simply mainstream Jewish thought, but a particular Hasidic tradition. Further, he argues that lying behind this, in a repressed form, is an even older tradition of Jewish alchemy.

While Wexler makes no claim to have evidence that either Freud or Durkheim were directly influenced by Hasidism or alchemy, he examines the parallels between the structure of their thoughts and those of the two traditions. Both Freud and Durkheim, argues Wexler, display a social psychology that is analytically similar to the dualism of Hasidism's Tanya and the general transformational models of alchemy. He considers this formal model as in opposition to the messianic tradition in Jewish thought and analyzes Freud and Durkheim as anti-messianic social psychologists. Hasidism offers a template for modern theories of social psychology, social interaction and the relation between the social and the individual, that is, collective identity.

In the final parts of Wexler's essay, he considers more generally how modern social theory might make sense of contemporary social phenomena by opening itself to the messianic and mystical traditions in Jewish thought. He suggests that the social and structural transformation associated with the information or network society require new analytic tools that allow us to explain social energy differently to the way Freud and Durkheim have guided social theory. Wexler sees as inadequate contemporary analyses of individualization, social movements and sacralization as forms of and reactions to alienation. Instead, he asks provocatively whether we should not 'restore a messianic, truly utopian "lost unity", which the alchemical, secular gnosis of modern social science displaced, and so renew social theory?'

In 'A Political Theology of the Empty Tomb: Christianity and the Return of the Sacred', Roberto Farneti takes issue with the implications of the work of the French anthropologist René Girard for facing

the contemporary challenge of the sacred. For Girard, the Gospels are not so much sacred in themselves as they are a means of emancipation from the sacred, which he associates with primordial violence; and the final task of Christianity is to finish the secularization process by dispelling what is left of the sacred, and thus to radicalize rather than deny Christian theology. However, an examination of Girard's theory of mimetic desire and his corresponding 'anthropology of secularization' reveals to Farneti that Girard pays insufficient attention to the tradition of political theology since Hobbes. This tradition, bound up with the advent of modernity and hence of secularization, is premised on a doctrine of Christ's ascension as 'a workable antidote to the contemporary resurgence of the sacred'.

Farneti points out that secularization, or the progressive reduction of the influence of religion in public life, does not necessarily mean desacralization, as the explosive return of the sacred in the contemporary world demonstrates. For Hobbes, the interregnum between Christ's ascension to Heaven and his predicted return to Earth places human beings in a position where they must create and live by their own political institutions. Hence, *Leviathan* proposes a set of institutions aimed at ending the civil wars caused in part by the temporary absence of God. Farneti suggests that, seen through the lens of an Hobbesian 'political theology of the empty tomb', Girard 'fails to provide an equally solid underpinning to the notion of human responsibility, namely, the quality of a person that has freed herself from the rules and constraints of a God-dominated world'. He concludes that contemporary responses to the return of the sacred may partly endorse but must also go beyond Girard's approach, particularly with regard to the relationship between politics and theology.

In 'Marxism and Christianity: Dependencies and Differences in Alasdair MacIntyre's critical social thought', Peter McMylor revisits Alasdair MacIntyre's critical engagement with Marxism. MacIntyre is a significant contemporary thinker in that, as McMylor observes, he is arguably the English-speaking world's most influential 'Aristotelian-Thomist' moral philosopher whose *After Virtue* constitutes a seminal 'settling of scores' with modernity and the Enlightenment project. In McMylor's view, MacIntyre's early encounter with, and sympathetic if critical embrace of, Marx's thought is notable for several reasons. First, it embodied an early and, in the context of the Cold War, bold anticipation of the subsequent reassertion of the 'humanist' interpretation of Marx. It was, in this regard, 'ahead of its time' and out of tune with the dominant perspectives on Marxism

within the 'Anglo-Saxon' philosophical establishment. Long before this became more widely acknowledged, it emphasized the role of Hegel and Feuerbach. Second, MacIntyre's reading of Marx brought into sharper focus the complex, tension-ridden, relationship between Marxism — an ostensibly secular intellectual and political project — and Christianity. In particular, as a moral philosopher, MacIntyre drew attention to the moral dimension of Marx's work and its relationship to the redemptive dimension of Christianity. For MacIntyre 'the most important characteristic in Marx's identification of the proletariat with "redemptive transformation" consists in the moral quality of his historical judgement, ultimately based on a vision that allows the overcoming of alienation'. Indeed, Marx, in MacIntyre's view, 'is more biblical than Hegel'.

McMylor notes MacIntyre's acceptance of Marx's critique of Hegel's thought as idealist and 'bourgeois'. MacIntyre drew a distinction between two types of prediction that 'go to the very heart of the issue of religious inheritance' within Marxism. The first is reflected in Marx's confidence that capitalism would be replaced by socialism. The second, differently grounded, prediction is reflected in his confidence that capitalism would display characteristics that derive 'from the maintenance of a chronic tendency to under-consumption'. The first kind of prediction relates to 'the Hegelian inheritance concerning the possibilities and capacities of human nature'. This would, in MacIntyre's view, render Marxism unintelligible as a political movement if it were not an expression of a secularized version of Christian virtue. The second kind of prediction, that capitalism would develop in certain directions and come to manifest specific properties, belongs to the realm of social science.

MacIntyre intimates that the two kinds of prediction can easily be confused. This, as McMylor points out, is exactly what — on MacIntyre's account — happens within Marxism. The blame, on his reading, is placed on Engels, whose 'positivistic' interpretation of Marx became so influential. This conflation of the two kinds of prediction lies at the source of the degradation of Marxism. It led to the suppression of the 'secularized theological inheritance' and to a kind of 'creedal deformation' in which 'loyalty to the movement might mean ignoring evidence or explaining it away'. This led, in MacIntyre's view, to the 'deification of the party or of history itself'. Thus the 'repressed spiritual dimension of Marxism' paradoxically 'returned in a distorted form as an agreed party line on reality' so that Marxism began to be '"practised" in precisely the same way as religious beliefs

have been practised'. In this regard, MacIntyre's account converges with the sociological view of Marxism as a 'political religion'. By 1968, in *Marxism and Christianity*, MacIntyre had come to the view that Marxism had been 'overcome by and (had) assimilated itself to the modes of thought of the very society of which it sought to be a critique'. This is not surprising if, as McMylor suggests, Eisenstadt is correct when he argues that 'the cultural and political programme of modernity and of modern political dynamics are deeply rooted in the religious components of the civilization which they developed, and these dimensions and tensions constitute in many ways the transformation, even if in secular terms, of some of the basic religious orientations and the tensions that have been constitutive of these civilizations' ('Religious origins of modern radicalism', *Theoria*, 106:51, as quoted by McMylor).

In 'Fire from Above, Fire from Below: Health, Justice and the Persistence of the Sacred' James Cochrane argues that social justice in the realm of global public health requires that we theorize the *persistence*, rather than the *return*, of the sacred. This essay situates itself philosophically and geographically in a broad context, yet it may be powerfully read as an intervention into the highly polarized contestation between science and culture that has characterized the HIV/AIDS treatment controversies in South Africa. Cochrane makes a careful claim for the legitimacy of religion, both as an analytical category and as a potentially emancipatory component, in addressing both the economic disparities and cultural diversities that accompany the issue of health in a world dominated by neo-liberal globalization and rationalized medicine.

Cochrane reminds us that the concept of public health care has religious roots, grounded in the history of the industrial revolution and colonial contexts, in which care for poor and rights-less people emerged overwhelmingly through faith-based initiatives. As medical care has become monetarized and the domain of state bureaucracies, experts, and aid organizations, this history has largely been erased from social memory. Rationalized health care has functioned increasingly through the treatment of human beings as chemical-based bodies. Yet, as the apparent impasse between biomedical and cultural interpretations of HIV/AIDS in South Africa demonstrates, health realities 'from below' are frequently as complicated and confused as policies 'from above'. Cochrane draws both upon social science and knowledge of African religious traditions (in which health and religion are essentially inseparable) to advance the innovative concept of

'healthworlds', which offers a means to retrieve the legitimacy of the non-rational and religious in policy decision-making. He illustrates his approach through empirical examples based on research he and his colleagues conducted, primarily in Lesotho, Zambia and the Eastern Cape of South Africa, under the auspices of the African Religious Health Assets Programme (ARHAP).

Cochrane frames his notion of justice in public health within an assets-based conception of human development, which affirms the resources that human agents possess and wish to conserve, rather than merely recognizing the deficits and lacks to be remedied. This is situated within the capabilities approach to justice and freedom advocated by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. Still urging a hermeneutic of suspicion in the incorporation of religion, given the reactionary political tendencies of some 'faith-based' initiatives, Cochrane calls us to acknowledge the persistence of the sacred in the 'healthworlds' of many people as crucial in creating policies that are ultimately more effective, and sensitive to human difference.

THE EDITORS