THE SECULAR SACRED **MICHAEL BENNETT**

INTRODUCTION

In late capitalist Western societies since the start of the twentieth century we have witnessed a gradual change in the nature of mainstream, organised religion. Indeed there is currently a very lively debate about the process of "secularisation" and the proposition that we live in a "postsecular society". It is not my concern to get involved in this discussion. But, with this debate in mind, I think I can reasonably say that Church attendances have definitely declined in Europe, Canada and Australia but this is not necessarily the case in the USA. In all these countries religious sentiment is no longer channelled purely or even predominantly by organised religion because many people now express it through a spiritual orientation to life. This has the result that the expression of religion has become increasingly privatised and based on the personal experience of spirituality rather than on universal cognitive claims concerning the ultimate transcendental nature of any particular theology or set of religious practices. In all these countries, (which, throughout, I am describing as "the West"), the de-churching process (with the USA not in full accord) and the associated shift towards an individualised and spiritual form of religious expression have been accompanied by the rationalisation and secularisation of our understanding of public morality. They have all experienced a process of disenchantment and the de-throning, at the societal level, of commonly held religious worldviews. For the purposes of my investigation here the significance of this process is not diminished by the blossoming of fundamentalist postures in both the Christian and Islamic faiths. Indeed an understanding of these fundamentalisms is an essential component in comprehending international politics, issues of domestic social solidarity and individual moral and religious motivation. But they do represent a regressive search for a level of theological and personal certainty that is both philosophically and psychologically naïve and has no valid place in the postmetaphysical world of the twenty-first century.

During the same period of time, at the secular level, we have witnessed the rise and fall of various grand narratives and totalising political ideologies. There is good reason to say that secularism, as a broad social movement and moral outlook, has failed somewhat. It has not managed to provide a convincing response to the bigotry of religious fundamentalism, not the least because it has simultaneously failed to show enough imagination to stimulate curiosity about the nature of religious motivation and why it is so appealing. Instead it has sometimes sunk into a rather simplistic, one-dimensional, almost fundamentalist, rationalism that can be monotonously antagonistic to religion and spirituality. It can all too easily simply dismiss the religious imperative as simply irrational.

Too dependent on a loose set of liberal values secularism, particularly as embodied in a humanist framework, has failed to set out an articulate and coherent philosophy and has been too dependent upon limiting itself to the easy target of shocking the pious and attacking some of the more obvious excesses of mainstream religion. Everyday secularism is unknowingly too close to the one-sided conception of reason that dominates consciousness and culture in Western societies. This is the sense of reason that is limited to the instrumental and the

technical – a theme we shall come to later. Such secularism has failed to produce a set of values or a way of life that can win over the human imagination and provide people with a persuasive, if not compelling, source of meaning that can not only transcend the confines of individualism, but also transcend specific cultures. In other words secularists haven't done secularism many favours.

At the philosophical level this process has been characterised by the seemingly inevitable hegemony of relativism in its various forms. The most virulent of these is, unquestionably, the radical deconstructionism found in postmodernism. Important though postmodernism has been both as a cultural movement and a valued warrior against the monological philosophy of consciousness and grand meta-narratives, it is, in essence, a subclass of relativism. It is this relativism, in its philosophical and cultural appearances, that underpins the current scenario of a pluralism of worldviews, many of which contradict the now questionable ethos of multiculturalism in that they do not simply offer alternative ways of accessing reality, rather they offer competing and *mutually exclusive* views of the world.

Given the failure of political grand narratives and religious cosmologies to redeem the human suffering and environmental disasters of the twentieth century, it is not surprising that intellectual and artistic circles display a chronic scepticism and disillusionment with either rational or spiritual claims to any kind of universalism – moral or otherwise. The moral universe has lost any traditional or metaphysical "givenness" and has come to be seen as a construct. A construct that is radically and hopelessly contextual and relative. The response to injustice now often seems limited to impotent moralistic indignation.

This process is often described as one of *disenchantment*. We end up with lives that seem flattened, fragmented and disconnected from: our inner, imaginative selves; from other people; from society at large; and from nature and a sense of the cosmos. It is a sense of existential isolation not only from these aspects of life, but also a sense of powerlessness with regard to how we might reverse this trend and have a more meaningful and satisfying existence. "Disenchantment" is a useful shorthand describe this state of affairs but needs using with caution. The word "enchantment" to describe a world that we have lost can be misleading yet it has the positive effect of stimulating our interest because it carries a hint of the luminal – a hint of something to desire, which, as we shall see, is essential to any conception of positive moral motivation. I am not seeking in any way to rediscover some long lost magical world where everybody felt connected to everybody else and to everything in the manner of a lovelorn New Age visionary. The search for a form of re-enchantment is not a backward-looking step to an imagined bucolic idyll, but a forward-looking move to reintegrate those imaginative and metaphorical aspects of our ethical and moral capacity that were undermined and devalued by the disenchantment process that overvalued the instrumental and technical aspects of reason, consciousness and culture. The key feature of a process of re-enchantment, or, in other words, the re-stimulation of our moral and ethical world, is that it is *reflexive*. That is, the people involved, both as outward facing citizens and as inward looking individuals, have an awareness that the key (or, if you like, the *sacred*) aspects of a new sense of moral and ethical motivation have to be based on a secular and rational foundation and cannot draw on the positing of an external transcendent being, process or principle.

In chapter one I consider how we might philosophically approach the subject of moral motivation in the context of understanding it as a secular form of the sacred. To develop this idea I have found it essential to start with an understanding of the idea of communicative

action as proposed by Jürgen Habermas. Using this theoretical structure I argue that it is possible to reconstruct a form of pragmatic universalism without falling into metaphysical illusions about any supposed ahistorical transcendent points. Habermas's *communicative* form of rationality enables us to identify some fixed features of the human form of life in a way that suggests that they might well be fruitfully described as being a secular ground for the idea of a sacred that promotes, but does not guarantee, moral motivation.

Before considering Habermas's conception of an immanent transcendent in communication, I investigate some of the limitations to be found in relativistic thinking. This includes the issues of: (a) incommensurability between cultures and languages - the recognition that value systems contain an unavoidable subjectivity does not necessarily mean that there is no way to compare them; (b) distinguishing between language games and the validity claims; (c) the radical sceptic - I consider the circularity involved in this radically relativistic position and the performative contradiction enacted by its proponents; (d) counterbalancing the notions of difference and diversity with those of solidarity and intersubjectivity.

Having defended my view of an immanent transcendent in communication from relativistic attacks I proceed to distinguish this notion of universality from other such claims by emphasising the *reflexivity* of my approach and its embeddedness in the presuppositions that are indispensable to any communication aimed at reaching an understanding and which, in practice, enable translation. These presuppositions are not a function of theory, but are a fact about the pragmatics of the human form of life as found in the social interaction of *communication* rather than in the more limited concept of language. They are expressed by the validity claims of truth, morality and authenticity. What I am trying to establish throughout this book is that the philosophical approach which communicative rationality represents is the only viable secular inheritor of the domain of the sacred. Moreover, the secular sacred power is reflexive by nature. We are not enslaved by it in the manner exemplified by the awesome nature of the holy.

The basic premise of communicative rationality is that communicative action has a rational basis built around the fundamental validity claims of truth, morality and authenticity. When a communication fails to reach an understanding it is through an investigation of these validity claims that we are able to reach an agreement. Over the years Habermas's theory of communicative action has been criticised for being overly formal and procedural, and for insufficiently accommodating the role of emotions and meaning in moral and ethical action. There is some truth in this claim but I argue that many critics have insufficiently understood the issues raised by the validity claim of authenticity and how this can address issues related to the role of emotions in discourse. For any communication to be understood we need to know that the speaker is genuinely expressing her internal mental state such that the utterance accurately represent an intention. The personal price of not doing this, and thereby acting inauthentically, is the experience of the emotions of guilt and shame. Thus within the presuppositions of communicative rationality it is the validity claim of authenticity which helps to bridge the gap of meaning between the procedural and the personal, the formal and the emotionally tactile.

In order to ground a theory of the secular sacred we need to complement these validity claims, which represent the presuppositions of discourse, with a notion of the rules of discourse which outline the best possible environment within which the rational validity of communications can be justified. Rational discourse is a privileged form of communication that rests on the top of everyday communication and gains objectivity through the process of

participants subjecting their views to critical evaluation, and modifying them through the dialectics of discourse. Following a discussion on the basic rules of discourse, I articulate the critical importance of reflexivity to discourse. Not only do we need discursive procedures that are cognitively reflexive, we also need participants who are psychologically self-aware and able to act autonomously. The reflexivity of discourse is also guaranteed by the ability of participants to be emotionally and perceptually receptive to the possibility of new and different interpretations.

For some the ability of the theory and practice of discourse to provide a firm grounding for the testing of the universal validity claims of communication is compromised by the way rhetoric and emotions may behave in deliberation. I argue that there is no necessary reason for rhetoric or emotions to act irrationally or manipulatively on the hearer. Reason and emotion are not necessarily antinomies. I consider a number of rhetorical devices that can enhance rational debate whilst understanding that we need to be vigilant against the manipulative possibilities that they offer. The role of emotions is often less well understood so I outline the different types that can appear in discourse as well as indicating how they can be accommodated without compromising the rational basis of the communication. Emotion should not, and cannot, be excluded from discourse, but participants do need to develop a psychological competence that enables them to integrate their emotions appropriately into their behaviour.

There are two objections to this notion of discourse. I think we can provide adequate answers to both of them. In the first instance critics question if any agreement can be universal. Indeed, in a world of competing values universality seems to be unachievable. Yet, the theory of communicative action is not based on any particular "supernorm" that trumps all others, but is, instead, a process of reaching universal agreement through conformity to *procedures* not *substance*. Secondly, Habermas's insistence that agreement has to be reached by participant using the same reasons has also been criticised. It is true that many conflicts can be resolved practically by means of compromise. But this can only work when the conflict does not involve a generalisable interest that applies to all citizens. When a generalisable interest is involved then it is imperative that any ensuring agreement is based on identical reasons because not all "reasons" are equally valid and some claims to rationality have no grounds at all for such a claim.

Throughout, a feature of my approach is the notion that moral motivation is not only related to the possibility of establishing a rational way of generating a secular sense of the sacred, but is also dependent upon the psychological competency of the individual. The ability to deliberate on moral values within discourse is dependent upon the competency of the participants to engage in such debate. Clearly not all citizens will be able to meet such expectations and will not have the reflexive awareness that is required by such an idea of moral action. There is no *theoretical* answer to such a problem because it is essentially a *practical* issue. The competency for reflexive moral action can only be acquired through socialisation and learning processes. These will take time and their success cannot be guaranteed since success is dependent upon social and political action.

Moral action therefore requires competent actors and rules of discourse whereby conflicting moral claims can be rationally resolved. But underpinning this are the universal and immanently transcendent qualities of communicative rationality. These necessary presuppositions provide the bulwark against radical relativism and enable us to begin to see them as the guarantors of a secular sense of the sacred. These presuppositions are not a

"thing" nor just a mere projection. They are a necessary feature of communication because they are embedded in, and constitutive of, the human *form of life*. Their pragmatically inescapable nature provides a basis for moral obligation and, because they are of such high value, they also operate as a sacred. None of this can provide us with a *categorical ought* but it can provide a reflexive and self-binding obligation. Nevertheless such an obligation is not subject to the spellbinding awe of a religious command. Later I shall address this motivational deficit with a discussion on the role of *reflexive mythology*.

In chapter two I take a little diversion to see how the ideas expressed so far can find relevance when we consider the issues of multiculturalism and religion in the public sphere. Multiculturalism has much to commend it but, in its stronger varieties, has tended towards a radical incommensurability between cultures. Communicative rationality can provide a useful critique of such thinking and also offer a productive connection with the role of religion in public life and a secular transformation of the sacred.

The central dilemma is well known. On the one hand, attempts to integrate diverse communities lead to protestations about the unique identity of each subculture, on the other, the inability of communication between subcultures can lead to Balkanisation. The way through this dilemma is neither one of building ever higher walls of incommensurability, nor is it to be found in the search for a "supernorm". Rather it is the case that agreement across cultures is possible because within the immanent structures found in all communication there are features that span all cultures. Attacks by strong multiculturalists on cross-cultural universals not only fall into the performance contradiction enacted by many relativists, they also oversimplify the whole issue. Their understanding of rationality is often limited to the instrumental variety of reason from which they are able to embark on a valid criticism of the hegemonic and imperialist nature of Western reason as it subdues the non-instrumental aspects of other cultures. But this ignores the fundamental proposition of communicative rationality which is that reason has three voices (truth, justice and authenticity) and cannot be limited to instrumentality. Moreover, the cross-cultural universality of these three voices does not undermine the particularity of the ethics of the good life that vary from culture to culture. Issues of art, sport, taste, kinship systems and relationships with nature are of no concern to the claims of universality so long as the three validity claims are not contradicted. We may be even bolder. Not all cultures are equal in terms of their discursive competency. Not all cultures have developed a cognitive and emotional reflexivity that enables them to adopt a hypothetical stance towards their own tradition. Some are epistemologically limited.

These issues also appear when we consider the nature of religion in the public sphere - or rather public spheres for I agree with the distinction between the *official* public sphere of the state and public bureaucracies, and the *unofficial* sphere of civil society. The former must be secular and based on rational deliberation if a democratic society is to avoid the catastrophic schisms that arise when the state becomes identified with any particular worldview or ideology. The more epistemologically advanced faith communities are able to understand this and, in the public sphere, hold their religion reflexively. It is essential that religions act in such a manner because the legitimacy of the secular state cannot simply rest on its technical and managerial competence - religious citizens must also consent to the validity of a secular state. In turn, this requires that believers develop the cognitive and emotional abilities that will facilitate such consent. The segregation of religion need not, however, be so rigid in the unofficial public sphere. Here religious people still need to be reflexive but their use of religious language is not just something that can be accommodated, it may also enrich and enlighten the instrumentality of the dominant culture.

In considering the different aspects of tolerance it is clear that the severe prejudices to be found in religious fundamentalism cannot be tolerated. Tolerance is not the indulgent acceptance of any and all views. We must differentiate between *discrimination* and *tolerance*. The former is unacceptable whilst the latter will involve accepting that people can hold strong non-discriminatory views with which we disagree yet cannot be dismissed as simple prejudice. The burden of this practice falls more heavily on the believer than the non-believer. Yet secularists cannot simply dismiss religion because, in the first instance, this would be a simple lack of tolerance. In the second to do so would deprive us of the many valuable insights that religions offer on the existential subjects such as death, suffering and isolation. These are subjects that are often overlooked by a secular outlook. Similarly, humanism does not appear to make great efforts to provide a solid philosophical basis for its own worldview. Hence, I believe, it is important for humanism and radical secularism to work with the theory of communicative action in order to establish some universals in communication that can inform moral philosophy. This not only facilitates tolerance towards religion, but enables greater dialogue with religion and creates the possibility of translating religious ideas into a secular context.

Having earlier questioned the idea that all cultures are equal, it is perhaps inevitable that I should ask a similar question of religion. Thus, in the main, Islam has been less successful than Christianity at achieving a separation between the church and the state. Similarly, it has been less successful at seeing itself through the eyes of others and thereby gaining a level of self-reflexivity. Communicative rationality provides the best means by which religions can gain more self-awareness and create the possibility for inter-religious dialogue. It also offers a productive possibility to encourage humanists and strict secularists to abandon their angry anti-clericalism and seek a dialogue with religion.

Our understanding of the relative value of different cultures can be assisted by drawing a distinction between two kinds of equality. One concerns *distributive justice* in relation to human rights and equal opportunities; the other concerns *recognition* whereby we value particular cultures and individuals. With the former, that which we value is the same for all: with the latter, the universal resides in the uniqueness of each person or culture. I investigate four issues that arise from this: (a) the overstatement of claims to irreconcilable difference; (b) the overstatement of the claim to the universality of that which is the same for all; (c) the difference between universal potential and its actual attainment; and (d) the over-extension of collective rights over individuals.

The last of these is complicated by the misconception that cultures operate as coherent and identifiable wholes of meaning and relationships. This dogma does not reflect the internal complexities of cultures which, by their nature, are not static but change over time and contain within them people who challenge the homogeneity of such groups. It is also the case that when marginalised groups seek recognition there is a danger that, in order to strengthen their case, they make essentialist claims that are deemed to apply equally to all members of the group thereby denying any variations from the supposed "common" identity. Moreover, people are not defined by just one group. They may be members of several groups each of which makes a different identity claim. This over-simplification of group identity finds it echo in a similarly simplistic view that all group members have a common, unified internal personal identity.

I conclude that strong multiculturalism is unduly divisive as well as incoherent. By drawing on the conceptual resources of communicative rationality we can resist the circularity of such cultural relativism as well as resisting the yearning for the kind of transcendent that most religions are interested in. We can also reach a clearer understanding of the separation of church and state as well as construct a more useful notion of tolerance. This line of reasoning can facilitate a productive dialogue with religion and seek to learn from it. The reflexive self-awareness of this approach encourages a spirit of curiosity about religion without the fear of somehow being "contaminated" by it. Yet, despite the discursive advantages of communicative rationality, reason is an insufficient provider of moral motivation - especially when compared with the strong attachments that are provided by religion and traditional cultures. In the next chapter I attempt to strengthen moral motivation by arguing that the immanent universals to be found in communication can act like a *secular* form of the *sacred*. Following that I shall seek to reinforce this by means of the power of mythological narratives that are reflexive.

Chapter three carries the title "The Secular Sacred" and represents a sharpening of my focus on how, in order to enhance moral motivation, we might translate a religious sense of the sacred into a secular context. The search to understand why people act morally is ancient and my aspiration is to give it a little nudge. Indeed, viewed from a Kantian perspective there is hardly a problem. The moral person should be able to disregard all prudential reasons and act solely on the will's freely chosen duty to unconditionally bind itself to a maxim. The problem is we rarely have the required psychological, emotional and cognitive competencies to act in such a way. We need help in order to act morally. This assistance can come in at least four forms: (a) the power of reason to persuade ourselves and others; (b) the persuasive power of symbols to stimulate our moral imagination; (c) the presence of a highly respected value or sacred "good" and (d) the restricting impact of the moral emotions of guilt and shame. We have discussed (a) and found it to be important, but of limited value. We shall address (b) later and (d) I have considered elsewhere. That leaves us with a discussion of the secular sacred.

Behaving morally is not easy. Reason is necessary and in some cases will be sufficient, but, as Habermas says, duties can *bind* the rational will but they do not necessarily *bend* it. We need other sources of persuasion. Through socialisation processes we learn various narratives that engage our moral imagination and supplement the rational will. Important though this is it is still insufficient. The intellectually and emotionally competent citizen is still missing the motive of being attracted to a powerful moral good. Something to raise us above our individual outlook towards that which is universally meaningful.

This "something", I propose, is the quasi-transcendent features of communication. It is definitely true that we cannot derive an "ought" from an "is" such that the existence of these features of communication by no means creates a necessary *obligation*. But this does not prevent them from providing *motivation*. They do not provide a categorical imperative, yet they do have a pragmatic necessity. Their fundamental importance in delineating the *human form of life* gives them, I argue, the highest level of prestige and status. In other words they can act like a *secular sacred* - a value that does not inhere in the object or practice but is knowingly and reflexively attributed. There "obligatory" nature is felt as the strength of our *motivation* to respect them.

Having articulated how we may derive a secular sense of the sacred I want to engage with religion and investigate how we might translate into a secular context some senses of the

sacred that are to be found in religion. Although I come from a secular background, I feel it important to begin by outlining the benefits of religion - strange though that may seem to some secularists. The following benefits (derived from Christianity) are of interest: (1) Western liberalism has derived many core concepts from Christianity including - autonomy, future progress, emancipation, individuality and free will; (2) we can use religion as a source of useful ideas that will help moral motivation - this is a severe challenge to secular rationalists, but they need to embrace greater epistemological flexibility in order to make themselves open to the treasures that are available; (3) the secular world can benefit by drawing on religion's more developed understanding of consolation with regard to the grand existential issues such as - death, suffering, grief, loneliness and so forth; (4) in a disenchanted political climate religion is able to offer a useful critique of society; (5) unfashionable as it may seem we should acknowledge that in a whole range of ways religion has been a force for good in the world with an uncountable number of good deeds alleviating suffering, caring for the sick and feeding the hungry.

Religion, therefore, still has much to offer, in which case we may be well placed to find a benefit in translating into the secular some of its ideas. This is my next task and I consider a number of concepts that can be translated. The first of which is the notion of communicative rationality replacing God as the transcendent that grounds morality. In order for religion to withstand the challenge of philosophy it has been forced to develop its theological arguments away from a grounding in metaphysics toward the requirements of rational discourse. By so doing it has drifted into the realm of communicative rationality. Once theology feels that it is obliged to justify itself through language rather than revelation the spellbinding nature of the holy is disempowered and justification of the sacred becomes subordinated to the jurisdiction of the preconditions of communication. These are issues of morality. What communicative rationality cannot do, of course, is offer any salvific promises.

The second concept to be translated is anamnesis. This concept is important because it holds that the remembrance of all past actions, along with the need to anticipate the remembrance of all future actions, is tied to the belief that *all* humans reside in a *universal fellowship*. I reflect on how the universality, in space and time, of God's love is illustrated by such Christian concepts as: the Trinity, necrology, All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day and the Kingdom of God. The concept of anamnesis embraces all the love and suffering for all people for all time. It is too rich an idea to ignore. In translating this idea into the concept of the universal human fellowship based on the universal features of communication, we rescue ethics and truth from the religious tradition and from the necessity of a transcendental guarantor.

Through acts of anamnesis we express our human solidarity by remembering our ancestors. In particular, we remember those who have suffered, because in a fallible universe we all break the bonds of fellowship from time to time. Some theologians, including Peukart, have raised the question of how we can come to terms with the suffering of innocent victims? In addressing this well known theological argument I naturally reject the theological support for the Christian ideas of redemption and salvation in favour of a secular concept of anamnesis that can provide consolation and hope. This can be done by an understanding of the following: (a) like bad karma, the negative consequences of the actions of our ancestors dwell within us. Once this link is made conscious we can therapeutically transform this suffering into something positive. (b) whilst we cannot go back in time and relieve suffering, through intense acts of hermeneutic understanding there is a sense in which historic suffering which is received with unflinching love in the present-day can be, in part, redeeming as we confer

meaning onto it and seek to eliminate such suffering in the future. (c) anamnesis can offer hope to the living, who, if there solidarity with their ancestors is copied by their successors, can reasonably expect similar solidarity and redemption from these successors. (d) in addition to hope, the deep inter-generational relationship that anamnesis represents can be a source of meaning and moral motivation. A life that is informed by such remembrance is a more authentic life and more able to protect itself from the causality of fate. (e) what of the perpetrators of suffering? As secular people we do not have the luxury of being able to assign them to eternal damnation. Nevertheless, a secular translation of anamnesis gives us the possibility of enabling the perpetrator to move through the redemptive cycle of guilt, punishment, sacrifice, compensatory action and expiation, just as the victims can be ennobled by the path of understanding, compassion, acceptance, love and forgiveness. In my final reflections on the suitability of the notion of anamnesis for translation, I suggest that the ritual processes associated with it (baptism, necrologies and last rites) will also translate well into a secular context.

With the concept of "reflexive utopianism" I suggest that we can translate the vision of the "Kingdom of God" from the religiously transcendent into the concept of an immanent "universal fellowship". Rather than abolishing transcendence we can make it accessible. The essential point is that such a utopian vision is *reflexive* in that it knows is self to be a "necessary fiction" or an "as if". With this it is rational for us to work toward a perfect end (so long as the end is based on explainable processes) even though the contingencies of life (accidents, illness, shortage of resources) may prevent the end being achieved.

The translation of the idea of "God as intersubjectivity" is slightly different because a similar concept already exists within communicative rationality. For Habermas, in his early writings, "God" can be seen as the religious name for the universal presuppositions of communication. Hence God becomes the religious reflection of the intersubjectivity that bonds human existence. In 2004 Garrigan used this concept in her empirical investigation into religious communities and reported that many of them felt that God is not just known through other people but that God *is* the relating itself.

Finally, I reflect on the translatability of the notion of the sacred itself and the associated ideas of sin, guilt and redemption. Various authors have bemoaned the lack of a secular sense of the sacred but have never been able to develop this idea philosophically. Communicative rationality gives us such an opportunity. The religious sense of the sacred is often described as being "other", non-human and transcendental. In comparison the presuppositions of communication offer an objective framework of otherness from the subjectivities of the participants -whilst keeping in mind that this objectivity operates reflexively as an "as if".

How might we accommodate the ideas of sin and evil within a secular frame? Ricouer argues that humanity's earliest connection with the sacred was concrete rather than symbolic. To break a taboo or stain a holy place was felt as a material danger that could threaten life and soul. This dread of impurity acts as a background for its translation into psychological states of guilt and shame. Yet this more symbolic notion still has the undercurrent of the dread of impurity. A sin operates symbolically as a violation of a *relationship*. Thus to transgress the sacred is felt like an act of betrayal or infidelity. The committing of a sin can therefore be seen to be operating within the ambit of the validity claim of *authenticity* rather than the validity claim of *justice*. The religious sense of transgressing the sacred as an act of *impurity* can be translated into being an act of *inauthenticity*. Furthermore this lack of authenticity is not just in relation to an internal sense of selfhood, but gains is extra sense of impurity from

being simultaneously a betrayal of the bond of human fellowship. There is, I argue, a meaningful secular way to talk about sin. By the same token we can articulate a secular conception of redemption.

Having developed the idea of a secular sense of the sacred we are still left with the problem of how we can make this meaningful such that people are motivated to identify with this view of the sacred. In chapter four I suggest that myths are an excellent vehicle for this task. The narrative form of the myth and its heavy usage of rhetorical devices enables the audience to identify with the story and experience a moral psychological catharsis as the lesson in the story strikes home. A successful interaction with a myth enables the listener to find the meaning to his life by placing his personal story within the frame of the larger narrative. However this gives us a problem. Traditional myths make a cognitive confusion between language and world and fail to distinguish them. This is what gives them ideological power. It might seem that to break the spellbinding power of myths by "seeing through" their false identification would be the death knell for myths. Not so. The application of *deconstruction* to myths opens the door for the conscious *reconstruction* of a new idea of myths that know themselves to be fictional and are held reflexively by psychologically competent actors. The issue I address concerns the moral motivational benefits to be gained from reflexive myths.

There is no accident in the connection between myths and the sacred. They have always been associated. But, if we reflect back on our discussion of Kant's notion of free will, doesn't the use of narratives with their emotional appeal sully the autonomy of the moral will? Not necessarily. A person who *needs* emotional motives to act morally may well make poor moral choices, but we can imagine the possibility of a person who is sufficiently autonomous to do her duty yet is assisted by emotional motivation. We should not fear the supplementation of reason with emotions and stories so long as the story and the actor have the capacity for reflexivity. We can also have some confidence with regard to a further fear that arises when we talk about mythology. The fusion of emotion and reason raises memories of the dangers so clearly illustrated by the fascist manipulation of mythology for propaganda purposes in the 1930s. Nowadays this seems unlikely to me in Western liberal democracies not only because the legal system, democratic institutions and civil society have proved to be a successful buffer against state interference, but also because the mythologies that I am interested in are reflexively rooted in communicative rationality in both their production and their reception by self-aware citizens.

What is it about myths that is so persuasive? Just as I looked at the role of rhetoric in deliberation I want to investigate the qualities of myths that enable them to touch our lives with meaning. In the first place, myths are soaked with rich imagery and they have a full range of rhetorical devices including metaphor, allegory and irony. Myths can operate in all art forms. They are more a form of wisdom than science and are concerned with the psychological effect of a symbol rather than its ability to represent something. Secondly, myths motivate people because they create involvement and identification. Coming from an oral tradition the transmission of myths was an interpersonal, social event. In mythic communication we sacrifice analytic distance in favour of emotional resonance with the characters who are larger-than-life and connect us to a grand narrative.

A further feature of myths is that their influence is enhanced by their claim to communicative validity. We need to differentiate myths from fables, legends and history. In distinction from these the claim of a myth to validity is not a claim to *truth* with regard to evidence and argument in discourse. Myths do not accurately describe facts, instead the mythic hero is true

to himself and the world he represents. The hero is displaying universal aspects of human behaviour and therefore gains legitimacy and persuasive power because it complies with the quasi-transcendental communicative validity claim of *authenticity*.

Myths are also persuasive because they enable psychological transformation in a similar fashion to the "shock of the new" in aesthetics. Except that the shock factor does not come particularly from new ways of seeing the world, instead it is more a new way of ethically relating to the world. We are awakened to a new sense of the universal and enabled to understand our role in a new moral cosmos. Myths enable us to find that heroic part of ourselves which enables us to have a full moral life along with every day acts of kindness and compassion.

However, the most important motivational quality of myth is its ability to generate erotic identification and stimulate our inner psychological world. But this is only possible if we have the psychological capacity to relate to them through our imagination. This imaginative ability must work on three levels: the *horizontal* - between ourselves, the myth and other people; the *vertical* - so that we can translate the myth internally in relation to our thoughts and desires: and *reflexively* - to enable us to tolerate ambivalence and resist the pull of eros to over-identify with a myth. It is hard to overemphasise the importance of the creative imagination in facilitating the internalisation of mythic images and enabling a personal and erotic identification with them. This process is quite distinct from a fascination with fantasies and daydreams and goes much deeper. Through creativity or psychological labour we transform a passive relation to fantasies into the created world of imagination. The imagination stimulates our desires, shapes our feelings, colours our cognition and connects us to others. By paying attention to our internal imagery we invest it with *psychological faith* and such a move represents the internal motion of *love* or *eros* as it transforms mere images into living presences. Our dulled and instrumental psyche re-mythologises itself so that our imagination can connect with the mythic narrative, images and archetypes and *enable a direct identification between our self and the universal values to be found in myths*. This is not a form of possession. A re-mythologised mind frees the imagination from a one-sided domination by instrumental rationality and yet is not enslaved by these images for they are held reflexively.

The "erotic" aspect (which clearly means more than just "sexual") of this intrapsychic process of identification with images to generate moral motivation needs expanding. Eros is that part of the psyche that needs and desires to overcome the "unbridgeable gulf" between self and other. In the final analysis it is the only thing that can overcome the stubbornness of otherness. Eros and love pull us through the void of difference. Beauty - psychological, spiritual and physical - literally moves us to a connection with the other and opens up the possibility of moral motivation. The best example of the nature of erotic connection is to be found in the linked psychotherapeutic concepts of *transference* and *counter-transference*.

Following a discussion on how the idea of erotic connection became reduced to the realm of sexuality and hence became a purely private experience devoid of mythological importance, I discuss how we may re-invest myths with significance. This involves (a) been clear about the difference between art and religion by refusing to collapse the latter into the former; (b) understanding the close relationship between ritual and myth; and (c) exploring the role of archetypal images.

Throughout I have stressed that the myths that I am advocating are *reflexive*. This means that when we identify with a mythical narrative or character we do so in *full awareness* of the fact that a myth is a fictional entity and any claims to truth must be subject to rational discourse. Reflexive myths know themselves to be myths. So, on the one hand, from the direction of production we need to create myths in such a way as to enable the audience to interpret them reflexively. This involves the conscious use of "open" rather than "closed" rhetorical devices, in other words the avoidance of covert manipulation. We therefore need transparency in the process of production. On the other hand, we have the consumption of myths. It is important that we socialise people into a resilient sense of self that can hold the ambivalence of identifying with a mythical character whilst being wary of over-identification. I address this issue of self-consciousness in further detail as well as the issue of how we can develop our cognitive skills to accommodate the epistemological ironies of mythological thinking.

To round-off my interest with the persuasive power of myths I explore, by means of illustration, how the approach to myths that I am advocating can be used to address environmental concerns. I explain how an appropriately reflexive mythological approach to nature can be embarked on by means of learning different forms of perception that facilitate erotic identification. This, in turn, will enhance our moral motivation with regard to our troubled environment and possibly provide us with the psychological *capacity* to endure the material *sacrifices* that we must inevitably make.

In Chapter five I explore the relationship between myths and ritual and how the latter might support moral action. Classically, if myth tells us a sacred story or religious dogma promotes certain values then successful enactment and transmission of these is typically dependent upon their practical application in ritual. Myth survives through ritual as images, feelings and cognition about the sacred are integrated into actual life experience. However, with relation to rituals, we don't live in classical times. In largely secular societies ritual has a diminished role in public and private life. Without ritual we lack reminders of transcendence. Such secular rituals that exist tend to cover issues of taste and custom or reflect mores that have no connection to the sacred. They lack purchase as agents of psychological change.

My primary interest in ritual is connected to their effectiveness in enabling us to identify with mythological narratives which, in turn, facilitate moral action. I look at rituals from three perspectives: as a *performance*; their *reflexivity* and the *creation* of new rituals. To help with this task my first step is to briefly identify the basic types and characteristics of rituals. So, a very common ritual practice is a rite of passage which assists participants in their transition through the major events of life such as puberty, marriage and death. These rituals help participants to interpret and express their whole life's trajectory within the context of the sacred. Calendrical rites populate with sacred significance both the natural world (as ritual activity is synchronised with the seasons) as well as the annual cycle of religious festivals and events. In another type of rite, participants try to communicate or relate to the divine. Thus we have the practices of offering, sacrifice, prayer and meditation. The final major type are those rituals that attempt to heal states of sin and illness. All of these forms of ritual activity are essentially stimulating a psychological transformation within the believer.

To varying degrees these rituals share a common set of characteristics. In the first place rituals tend to be formal because they use a limited set of expressions and symbols. Secondly, many rituals are keen to trace themselves back through history as a means of appealing to traditions that bestow them with legitimacy. Rituals also typically offer a good supply of richly endowed symbols. Some of these are used to condense a range of experiences and tend

to be mainly emotional, whilst others are inwardly focused and provide a vehicle for thinking. Perhaps the most obvious feature of ritual activity is repetition whereby the participants continually enact the same words, gestures and actions. Repetition has the dual function of stressing the timelessness of the practice (and, by inference, the ideas behind it) and ensuring the remembrance of the specific religious traditions involved.

The final, and from my perspective, most interesting characteristic of ritual is the fact that it is a performance. Rather than seeing the ritual as a rigid set of actions to be repeated, we can see it from the participant's perspective in terms of the conscious "doing" of the ritual actions. This stimulates either a psychological transformation, or maintains a previous such transformation in line with the values of the religion or mythology. Thus, from my perspective, once communicative rationality has provided a rational understanding of the basic universals in life, we can envisage that reflexively constructed ritual performances will be able to augment the role of reflexive mythology in integrating moral awareness and moral motivation into everyday life. When we interpret ritual as performance we can, I think, more readily understand the importance of ritual in facilitating psychological identification. This is because in performance the cognitive aspect is clearly seen to be supplemented by the physical, sensory and emotional aspects thereby providing a more total experience. Performance, therefore, provides participants with a compelling and experiential sense of the rightness of a community's moral world. A world that is inhabited and not just observed.

We have a paradox. On the one hand I have discussed the performative aspect of rituals, whilst throughout I have also emphasised the need for reflexivity. The former places us directly in the experience, whereas the latter would appear to require distance. Let us differentiate between cognitive and psychological reflexivity. Cognitive reflexivity, which is the dominant form of self-an awareness in Western culture, is indeed experientially distancing, but my interest is with psychological self-awareness which allows us to be simultaneously "in" and "out" of the experience. We can feel a feeling and identify with it without being completely immersed in it. With this kind of self-awareness we can feel the effect upon us of a ritual practice without either, losing our autonomy in relation to it, or, being crippled by self-consciousness. Reflexivity is therefore not a bar to ritual efficacy and is, indeed, vital in order to prevent us being deceived by the manipulative misuse of a ritual or from being mesmerised by scrupulousness.

If rituals help us to identify with mythological narratives and they simultaneously need to be reflexive then, I suggest, they are in short supply. I therefore argue that it is possible to create new myths - something that is less obvious than it seems given the creatively inhibiting strong link between ritual and tradition. It was long feared that a ritual could not be *created* because, if the basis of a traditional myth was seen to be a human construction, it would be "seen through" and lose its efficacy. However, as I claim that a reflexive relationship to a ritual is possible, there can be no problem with the awareness of the fact that a myth is a construct. This, in turn, removes any obstacles to our ability to create new rituals. The Olympic ceremonies validate this observation. It is therefore quite possible to create a new body of rituals that would support a similarly new body of reflexive myths in order to stimulate and support people with the moral motivation.

I have constantly referred to the importance of the role of the cognitive and psychological competencies of the person. In Chapter six I examine some key aspects of the kind of selfhood that we require if we are to maintain an identity that is able to identify with a moral point of view which is based on a secular understanding that rationality is embedded in

communication. To do this I discuss such issues as: autonomy, authenticity, intersubjectivity, the decentred self and psychological reflexivity.

Regarding the subject of moral motivation autonomy is perhaps the most important aspect of self. When acting autonomously we exercise choice in accepting a moral obligation regardless of the presence of any external sanctions. It was Kant who developed our understanding of moral obligation beyond the need for the presence of threats and rewards towards the position that it is only my own autonomous *will* that can make a moral obligation normative *for me*. The autonomous world is self-determining but not self-centred. We cannot simply choose any action because we will it. Rather the autonomous person must act rationally in accordance with the categorical imperative or golden rule. However, the classical Kantian view of autonomy is too individualistic. For Habermas the autonomous person is situated in, and constituted by, a web of intersubjective relationships. Hence the application of the autonomous will to a moral decision is subject to rational scrutiny. But such scrutiny is not the self-auditing by the individual in relation to abstract rationality, rather it is a process of public scrutiny as the moral action in question is subjected to the rules of discourse and the three validity claims of truth, justice and authenticity. This conception of autonomy is inherently more public and psychological than that offered by Kant.

At the same time it can also be more private. To be a competent autonomous person is not just a matter of acting in accordance with the public rules of discourse, we must also have the capacity to act authentically in accordance with our personal identity and ethical standards. Self-direction assumes that we have personal agency. That is, there must be a practical unity between the self that makes choices and the self's process of choice-making. To actively choose means that we are acting on the basis of reasons and that there must be a sense of self that is above the simple expression of desire and is able to exercise its will through rational deliberation. Autonomy therefore requires a high degree of unity between self, agency and reason.

The move from a transcendental to psychological understanding of autonomy is intuitively more realistic, yet, defined in this way, it is more vulnerable to change because it is a learned skill rather than an inner essence. Viewed psychotherapeutically, autonomy is subject to erosion when our psychological competence is limited by a range of disturbances including such things as anxiety, depression, psychosis, phobia and so on. Yet such a viewpoint has its positive dimension because psychotherapeutic interventions can help restore our competency to act autonomously. Indeed, entry into therapy is a conscious act of surrendering a degree of personal autonomy to the therapeutic process in order to regain more of it by the end.

The idea of authenticity overlaps with that of autonomy to the degree that they both involve the individual's ability to follow self-imposed principles. They diverge in the method of application. With authenticity we are encouraged to acknowledge and act inclusively towards those aspects of our selfhood which seek to divert us from acting autonomously, whereas autonomous behaviour has a tendency to ignore and override them. Autonomy, therefore, requires the capacity of our authentic self to reflexively accommodate the "undesired" aspects of the self so that they can be organised into a coherent life history to which one can be held to account. The authentic self is not just a sequence of events, but has a narrative quality because, to be recognised as a valid self, we have to see ourselves in terms of purposes, values and goals. Our life as an authentic person consequently expresses a *moral totality*.

Because authenticity has an orientation toward inclusivity it is signally expressed by the quality of *transparency*. The acknowledgement of the shadow side of our selfhood is closely linked to the imperative to openly reveal this part of our identity to ourselves and to others. The reflexivity that is required in order to act morally with regard to a secular sacred demands a high level of self-transparency. And, in the context of the three validity claims that critically support the theory of communicative rationality, we can see that our ability to act in accordance with the claims of justice and truth, is directly dependent upon being valued as an authentic person - as someone who can be *trusted* when making any claims about truth and justice. All the validity claims are based on reason, but reason takes a different voice with each particular claim. Whereas with justice we judge the rationality of our behaviour by measuring it against *moral* norms, with regard to truth rationality works through the creation of *facts*, and with authenticity we assess a person's rationality in line with the coherence between his intentions and actions. It may be of little surprise to realise that authenticity is the rational counterpart of the religious value of *purity*.

Concepts like autonomy and authenticity can tempt us into a view of the self that is too individualised. We need to balance this with an understanding that intersubjectivity resides at the core of our being. The self that I am is thoroughly constituted through the process of mutual recognition between people. This makes us dependent on, and vulnerable to, the actions of other people - hence the functional need for morals to protect us. Thus my autonomy is premised on being surrounded by similarly autonomous people who can competently follow moral obligations. The intersubjective nature of the self situates our individuality within the framework of solidarity so that I can only be the autonomous and authentic person that I am, or aspire to be, when I recognise that I inhabit a universal human fellowship. Your freedom becomes the condition of my freedom. If we recall my thoughts on anamnesis then we can see that intersubjectivity doesn't just work horizontally within current timeframes, but also works vertically as we become sensitive to our connections with our ancestors and successors.

Finally, there are two remaining aspects of selfhood that are essential if we are to describe a form of selfhood that is able to gain moral motivation by identifying with reflexive myths and rituals en route to connecting with a secular sense of the sacred. The traditional view of the self as a singular and unified entity has been under pressure for some time from a range of alternative perspectives. We now feel reasonably comfortable with conceiving the self as something that can find expression through a range of characters speaking at different times. In other words, the self loses its monopolistic centre and becomes *decentred*. The plural nature of the self can be celebrated as part of the richness of being human. It enables us to hold contradictory views, paradoxes and ambivalences without having to identify with any single one of them. It is only the decentred self that has the capacity to live with the paradox that is the secular sacred. Nevertheless I am keen to differentiate between the decentred self and the fragmented self that has been supported by some postmodernists. To my mind, the promotion of the idea of a multiplicity of selves without any form of integrative core identity creates the notion of a *fragmented* self which is just a disguised form of mental illness.

Linked to the idea of the decentred self is the idea of the reflexive self. Such a self is able to cognitively and emotionally stand back from a given stimulus, context or experience and evaluate it through an appeal to reason. Reflexivity can also go by the name of self-awareness, self-reflection, self-consciousness and self-transparency. It has the emancipatory power of liberating us from dogmatic delusions and uncertainties, and is a key feature of processes of argumentation and deliberation. Participants in discourse must be able to see

themselves through the eyes of others and gain a reflexive distance with regards to their thoughts and feelings.

Moral motivation leading to moral action is, I have argued, a human competence. I have considered how the idea of communicative rationality can offer a credible alternative to relativism and opened the door to a sense of the universal derived from the pragmatic presuppositions that are found in all communication. With a little imagination we can productively value these universals as having the quality of being sacred in a way that is both secular and rational. For us to be able to morally identify with the sacred I have suggested that both reflexive mythologies and rituals can be powerful allies. None of this is possible without people possessing a specific range of psychological skills. Not everybody has them. But because the skills are learned through socialisation processes we all have the potential to learn them and reach out to each other within our universal fellowship.