



FORUM: Postkoloniale Arbeiten / Postcolonial Studies

“‘Europe’ and ‘The Islamic World’ – Perceptions and Stereotypes,” paper presented at the Third Workshop on New Institutional Organisation Theory at the University of Bergamo, Italy, 23 & 24 March 2007

## **‘Europe’ and ‘The Islamic World’ – Perceptions and Stereotypes<sup>1</sup>**

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On September 12, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI gave a lecture at the University of Regensburg, Germany, in which he cited from a fictitious dialogue between the Byzantine Emperor Manuel Paleologos II (1350-1425) and “an educated Persian”, in which the Emperor claimed provocatively that Muhammad had brought “things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached”.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.’ The emperor, after having expressed himself so forcefully, goes on to explain in detail the reasons why spreading the faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul. ‘God’, he says, ‘is not pleased by blood – and not acting reasonably (συνλόγω) is contrary to God’s nature. Faith is born of the soul, not the body. Whoever would lead someone to faith needs the ability to

This quote triggered a wave of indignation in the Muslim world. Struggling to understand the motivation behind the quotation, commentators made numerous references to the Pope being a German, a European, and a Westerner and their responses are replete with reflections of/n stereotypes prevailing in ‘the West’ about ‘the Muslim world’ and in ‘the Muslim world’ about ‘the West’. The main theme of the speech, however, was the role of reason and faith in science, philosophy, and theology. It entailed a criticism of the ‘positivistic reason’ prevalent in the West and of the ‘exclusion of the divine from the universality of reason.’ There were, therefore, also responses to this subject – science as the dominant paradigm of modernity – which is often perceived as Western and thereby as predisposed against a non-Western, Muslim world.

As an illustration of the controversy, I will briefly discuss two responses to the Pope’s speech. The first is an editorial by the renowned Indian philosopher and political scientist Pratap Bhanu Mehta.<sup>3</sup> Mehta concludes his editorial in *The Indian Express* with the laconic remark:

There is a story about the great intellectual Leszek Kolakowski. His stunning but critical history of Marxism was controversial among purveyors of another orthodoxy: the Marxists. The sentence they took most exception to was the first, which simply said, ‘Karl Marx was a German Philosopher.’ They thought this pulled Marx down a few pegs: the ‘German’ gesturing to parochial vagaries that might have infected the carrier of universal scientific truth and the ‘philosopher’ gesturing to the fact that all talk of the abolition of the distinction between theory and praxis was premature. Perhaps we might say of Pope Benedict’s musings on God and reason, ‘He sounds like a German Philosopher’ and leave it at that.<sup>4</sup>

Mehta’s remark is only comprehensible before the backdrop of a frame of reference where “German parochial vagaries” are almost proverbial – a stereotype hardly known to Germans today. The reference frame is Anglo-Saxon and dates back to the aftermath of WWII where ‘Krautbashing’ was very popular. Churchill, for instance, once uttered

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... speak well and to reason properly, without violence and threats ... To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm, or weapons of any kind, or any other means of threatening a person with death ...’ Cf. Joseph Alois ‘Benedikt XVI.’ Ratzinger. “Faith, Reason, and the University. Memories and Reflections.” Vatican, September (2006): [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060912\\_university-regensburg\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html).

<sup>3</sup> Mehta has in the past been Professor of Government and of Social Studies at Harvard University and Professor of Philosophy, Law, and Governance at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. He obtained his B.A. from Oxford and his Ph.D. in Politics from Princeton University. Mehta has been a columnist for *The New Republic*, *Foreign Policy*, *The Hindu*, and *The Calcutta Telegraph* and has served as an editorial consultant for *The Indian Express*. He heads one of the most influential Indian think tanks, the *Centre for Policy Research* in New Delhi.

<sup>4</sup> Pratap Bhanu Mehta. “Our Fragile Mind.” *The Indian Express*, 19 September 2006 (editorial page).

that “the Indians<sup>5</sup> were ‘the beastliest people in the world, next to the Germans’.”<sup>6</sup> During the war, German bashing may have been a legitimate way of venting frustration after the devastation German bombs caused and since, as a consequence of the war, the British lost their Indian colony. While Churchill may have been worried about the loss of Empire, the average European (and people all over the world) continue to bash Germans because of the Holocaust. In many of the responses to the Pope’s speech, the association Benedict – German – Hitler – Nazi seems to come quite easily.<sup>7</sup>

The other stereotype alluded to by Mehta is the cliché of the philosopher who is bereft of all sense of practicality. This is a more familiar cliché everywhere the world. Both stereotypes taken together and applied to Benedict do not produce a very complimentary image. What is insinuated is that the Pope is a provincial simpleton. Moreover, since Mehta applies categories to the Pope that purport to be true of all Germans (and of all philosophers), his insinuation is likely to affect even those Germans (or philosophers) who otherwise have no commonalities with the Pope or with the institution that he represents. The example illustrates what is involved in the use of stereotypes. It’s like shooting sparrows with a canon.<sup>8</sup> You are bound to cause some collateral damage even among the nicer species in the bird family.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, Germans (including Pope Benedict XVI) do not walk about thinking of themselves as little Hitlers. They generally have, like most other people, neutral or rather positive self-images. Most Germans would be surprised to learn that in the perception of some other people(s), they still are associated with Nazism first and foremost. Thus, German readers of this article, after going through the exercise of being exposed to the distressing effects of such stereotypical perceptions when they are about them, are in a better position now to understand what stereotypes can do to others with whom they do not share a similar tribal affiliation.

As a second example from many well-informed rejoinders on the Pope’s Regensburg speech, I have chosen an essay by Hilal Sezgin.<sup>10</sup> In the Berlin-based daily *die tageszeitung* she writes:

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<sup>5</sup> ... who, according to Churchill, ‘breed like rabbits’ and therefore starved to death in millions during the Bengal famine of 1943.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Amartya Sen. *Identity and Violence. The Illusion of Destiny*. London: Norton, 2006, p. 106. Sen cites from Andrew Roberts. *Eminent Churchillians*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994, p. 213.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Michael Dusche. “Europe and the West as Reflected in the Responses to the Regensburg Lecture of Pope Benedict XVI,” paper prepared for the conference on Europe’s Diversity – Identities and Spaces by the Humanistic Centre for the Study of History and Culture of Eastern Central Europe, June 6-9, 2007, in Leipzig, Germany (forthcoming).

<sup>8</sup> A German proverb equivalent to the expression “Who breaks butterflies upon a wheel?”

<sup>9</sup> At times you even shoot yourself in the foot, i.e. if you’re a philosopher yourself and if Indians equal Germans in their beastliness.

<sup>10</sup> Sezgin is an editor for the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and a fiction writer.

The reproach that Islam was spread by the sword is almost as old as the encounter between Christendom and Islam generally. It can be classed among the three principal stereotypes that constitute Islamophobia. The other two have it that Muhammad was a power-hungry and sex-hungry man who kept a beautiful harem under the cloak of his prophethood. And that Islam as a quasi pre-civilised religion lacks the component of reason that alone could guarantee the survival of any religion in the modern world. The spiteful mention of the sword of Islam and that about Muhammad the man can be traced back for centuries and they can be reactivated again and again ... The third stereotype, however, about Islam’s lack of reasonableness seems to date from more recent times ... In his Regensburg speech, the Pope refers mainly to the latter stereotype, but he manages to touch lightly on the question of Islamic violence by way of a short swipe at Muhammad. And that not in the much quoted passage according to which the Prophet had brought ‘things only evil and inhuman’ that were new. This is clearly a quotation from medieval source. It is Benedict XVI’s own comment that is directed against Muhammad: ‘The emperor must have known that surah 2,256 reads: There is no compulsion in religion. *It is one of the suras of the early period, when Mohammed was still powerless and under threat.*’ The italics represent what the speaker slips in rather rhetorically and en-passant: Only when Muhammad did not have the power at his command to forcefully proselytise others did he object to the ethical abjection of so doing. The thematic context of the speech does not necessitate a recourse to Islam at all. Can it be assumed that the orator just grasped at the opportunity to smuggle in some Islamophobia?<sup>11</sup>

Sezgin’s example shows how stereotypes act, just as the previous example does: For stereotypes to work, a frame of reference is required from which they are available as part of generally accepted knowledge about the world. As such they are not unquestionable; but for the most part they are not actually questioned. On the contrary. On every occasion that somebody refers to a stereotype, its taken-for-granted-certainty is reconfirmed and dissent is suppressed. After all, who wants to question what most take for granted? Moreover, like in the previous case, the stereotype overshoots the target. Sezgin may not even regard herself primarily as a Muslim. Nevertheless she must feel affronted when Islam and its Prophet is being judged from such a prominent speaker in such a casual and blanket manner. The second example illustrates how systematic reflection can help differentiate our views and debilitate stereotypes. Occasionally, however, as in the first case, learned discourse can also help to perpetuate stereotypes and even furnish them with an authority they do not deserve.

The analysis of these two responses to Benedict’s speech exemplify what this project<sup>12</sup> is all about. The selective sample stands for an array of reactions from the spheres of learned discourse that I will analyse for their prevailing stereotypes about ‘Europe’ / ‘the

<sup>11</sup> Hilal Sezgin. „Stolzes Vorurteil.“ *Die Tageszeitung*, 20 November 2006, p. 11 [my translation; emphasis in original]

<sup>12</sup> Cf. the BMBF-sponsored research project “Perceptions of Threat; ‘Europe’ and ‘The Islamic World’;” [http://www.uni-erfurt.de/mobilisierung\\_religion/en/individual%20projects/3\\_1.htm](http://www.uni-erfurt.de/mobilisierung_religion/en/individual%20projects/3_1.htm).

West’ and the so-called ‘Muslim world’ respectively. The project attempts to capture the principal patterns of threat perceptions and the patterns of stereotyping the ‘other’ on both sides, hoping that an insight into the mutuality, and often symmetry, of such perceptions will help improve the conditions for dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution. As a methodology, this project is using the analytic and conceptual tools of New Institutionalism as conceived by John W. Meyer and his team,<sup>13</sup> with some exceptions.

The first point of disagreement is with Meyer’s rendering of the modern cultural reference frame as ‘Western’ and of the world polity as being permeated by ‘Western’ principles. I would argue, however, that the use of ‘modern’ instead of ‘Western’ would be more sensible in the context of inter-cultural dialogue as it might be less antagonistic to scholars from non-Western societies who subscribe to principles of modernity but reject the West’s exclusive claim to them.

This is in line with what Amartya Sen admonishes in a recent book, namely that

the limited horizon of the colonized mind and its fixation with the West – whether in resentment or in admiration – has to be overcome. It cannot make sense to see oneself primarily as someone who (or whose ancestors) have been misrepresented, or treated badly, by colonialists, no matter how true that identification may be ... To lead a life in which resentment against an imposed inferiority from past history comes to dominate one’s priorities today cannot but be unfair to oneself ... the nature of this ‘reactive self-perception’ has had far-reaching effects on contemporary affairs. This includes ... the encouragement it has given to needless hostility to many global ideas (such as democracy and personal liberty) under the mistaken impression that these are ‘Western’ ideas, and ... support it has tended to give to the growth of religious fundamentalism and even to international terrorism.<sup>14</sup>

The debates surrounding ‘Western Science’ versus ‘Eastern Spirituality’,<sup>15</sup> ‘Western Values’ versus ‘Asian Values’,<sup>16</sup> ‘Western conceptions of Human Rights’ versus ‘African’<sup>17</sup> or ‘Islamic Human Rights’<sup>18</sup> bear witness to the phenomenon that Sen

<sup>13</sup> Cf. John W. Meyer. *Weltkultur. Wie die Westlichen Prinzipien die Welt durchdringen*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Sen, *Identity and Violence*, chap. 5 [West and Anti-West], p. 88f.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Partha Chatterjee’s discussion of the ‘material-spiritual divide’ in the context of anti-colonial nationalism in: *The Nation and its Fragments*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Michael Hill. ‘Asian Values’ as Reverse Orientalism. *The case of Singapore*. Edited by National University of Singapore Department of Sociology, *Working Paper Series*. Singapore: Select Books, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Josiah A. M. Cobbah. “African Values and the Human Rights Debate: An African Perspective.” *Human Rights Quarterly* 9 (1987): 309-331.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. the “Déclaration islamique universelle des Droits de l’homme, 19/09/1981,” edited by the Conseil Islamique. London: (Islamiyah), 1981. Critically: Abdullahi Ahmed AnNa’im. “Human Rights in the Muslim World.” In *International Human Rights in Context*, edited by Henry Steiner and Philipp Alston. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.

criticises – an excessive fixation with the West and, consequently, a propensity to define one’s post-colonial identity reactively as ‘anti-Western’. The problem with this attitude is that it confounds the genesis and the validity of the concept of human rights and other allegedly ‘Western’ concepts. Nobody would deny the usefulness of the trigonometric concept of ‘sine’ and ‘cosine’ and of the decimal numeral system including the number zero in mathematics even though they are of Indian origin.<sup>19</sup> Likewise it would be quite harmful to deny the usefulness of the concepts of individual liberty, democracy, and progress for the whole world even though they may have originated in the West. This is not to deny that standard precepts of modernity such as the *nation state*, *justice*, and *progress*<sup>20</sup> gained global hegemony<sup>21</sup> in the process of colonial expansion and later imperialism of the European nations and that these processes were accompanied by great injustices and sufferings on the part of the colonised subjects. But to attempt to revise this history in the name of anti-Western resentment or in the name of a largely imaginative pre-colonial cultural purity would, in their fixation with the West, actually be reconfirming the grip that the West still has on the mind of the post-colonial subject.

The second point of disagreement is with Meyer’s use of the term ‘religion’. In the transition from traditional to modern cultural modes, natural law and natural rights take the place of the sacral in the semiotic context of the older frame, which was conceived as equally universal by religious authorities (e.g. the Church, the ulama). I would not, however, go so far as Meyer as to call the idea of human rights ‘religious’ in the same way as the idea of God (or Gods) as guarantor(s) of the/a social and legal order on earth and in the world beyond.<sup>22</sup> I would prefer to restrict the term ‘religious’ (in the literal sense) to those beliefs, actions and their addressees to which humans can relate through acts of praying, thanking, and offering.<sup>23</sup> The individual whose sacrosanctity is postulated in the idea of human rights, by contrast, can never be the subject of such actions. Human rights may have a similar regulative function within the semiotic reference frame of modernity as compared to that of the pre-modern age, but they are still very different from Religion. The difference lies in the magical outlook that is

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<sup>19</sup> Amartya Sen gives an account of how the term ‘sine’ derives from the Sanskrit term ‘ardha-jya’ introduced by the mathematician Aryabhata in the fifth century C.E., cf. Sen, *Identity and Violence*, p. 129.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. John W. Meyer, John Boli, and George M. Thomas. “Ontology and Rationalization in the Western Cultural Account.” In *Institutional structure. Constituting State, Society, and the Individual*, edited by George M. Thomas, John W. Meyer, Francisco O. Ramirez and John Boli, 12-38. Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1987, p. 12. I am quoting from the German translation: “Ontologie und Rationalisierung im Zurechnungssystem der Westlichen Kultur.” In *Weltkultur. Wie die Westlichen Prinzipien die Welt durchdringen*, edited by John W. Meyer, 17-46. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> My use of the terms ‘dominance’ and ‘hegemony’ correspond to that of Antonio Gramsci and followers, i.e. Ranajit Guha. *Dominance without Hegemony*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998 (Harvard UP 1977).

<sup>22</sup> Meyer, *Weltkultur*, p. 38ff.

<sup>23</sup> Considered to be an anthropological constant. Cf. Ernst Tugendhat. “Whom to Thank?” *Signandsigt*, 27 December 2007, p. [www.signandsigt.com/features/1107.html](http://www.signandsigt.com/features/1107.html).

implicit in religious actions. According to the magical world view, there can be a causal link between an individual’s inner states (wishing, thinking, cursing, praying) and the outer world. This is precisely what modernity rejects on the basis of scientific rationality. Instead, it painfully embraces the disenchantment of the world. To call both regulative ideals ‘religious’ would obliterate this difference. The project would therefore hesitate to call both ideas ‘religious’ in the same, literal sense – it may still be called ‘religious’ in inverted commas, as a manner of speaking, though.<sup>24</sup>

The usefulness of Meyer’s approach for the project lies in a different matter. Meyer and his team have emphasised the importance of the global cultural reference frame that defines and characterises the natural and social worlds for the actors. As such, it also determines the potential threats that can arise from both the natural and the social world. This project is interested in the cultural definitions of threat that arise from the social world. Such patterns, this is our conjecture, are encoded in the cultural reference frame in the form of stereotyped perceptions of the ‘other’. For the actors, these stereotypes pre-determine and limit what they perceive as a potential threat. Unfortunately, however, they show a remarkable resilience to empirical falsification or analytical scrutiny, which renders them persistent over time and almost immune from critique.

Often enemy conceptions are particularly persistent in places where hardly any instance of the assumed ‘enemy’ can be found. Thus, anti-Islamic sentiment can be strong even among those who have never talked to a Muslim in their life-time.<sup>25</sup> This observation can be sustained by a look at the history of relations between the Christian Occident and the Muslim world. Wherever Christians and Muslims interacted on an everyday level, there was at least a chance to break the spell of prefigured modes of perceiving the other as a potential threat, i.e. in Moorish Spain, in the Holy Land, in the Balkans, etc.<sup>26</sup> Similar observations can be made with respect to the encounter of Muslims and non-Muslims in the Indian context.<sup>27</sup> The results were inter-religious marriages, hybrid religious practises, back and forth conversions, and a vexing blur of limits and borderlines – vexing particularly for those back in the power centres who had an interest in maintaining difference.<sup>28</sup> The maintenance of difference and the cultivation of threat

<sup>24</sup> Of course Meyer also draws this distinction when he speaks of the spheres of the divine, of morality, and of nature as being radically disconnected in the logic of the modern reference frame. Cf. Meyer, *Weltkultur*, p. 39f.

<sup>25</sup> Similarly, anti-Semitism is strong even in those areas where the likelihood of anyone meeting a Jew is close to none. Xenophobia thrives even in those social milieus that are least likely to directly interact with perceived ‘others’.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Andrew Wheatcroft. *Infidels. The Conflict between Christendom and Islam 638-2002*. London: Viking, 2003.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Shail Mayaram. *Resisting Regimes. Myth, Memory and the Shaping of a Muslim Identity*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.

<sup>28</sup> Wheatcroft gives examples of European clergymen calling on crusading knights to keep their distance from the ways of the Saracens. We know of similar examples from India, e.g. Aurangzeb abandoning the religious tolerance of his predecessors or the British East India Company trying to keep its employees from ‘going native’; etc.

perceptions is often a matter of ideological and political exigency and not of experience or analysis.

Meyer and his team have also emphasised the importance of science in the modern cultural reference frame. They have observed that under the aegis of global modernity, the degree to which ideas gain cultural legitimacy and global hegemony increases according to the extent that they appear to be founded in science. Since the influence of science as a social system on the global cultural reference frame is so eminent, paradigm shifts taking place in this system radiate into other subsystems of the world polity such as the global media, international politics, and legislation. Since stereotyped conceptions of the ‘other’ are cultural constructs, they can always be empirically challenged and analytically deconstructed. This is the eminent task of scientific research. This project is therefore focussed on science as a social system.<sup>29</sup> It is here that we are most likely to find a solution to the problem and it is here that an impasse to that solution might first become apparent. The aim is to investigate the ability of the sub-system of science as it is instantiated in universities and research institutes and fanned out in a variety of disciplines, to critically question the adequacy of cultural patterns that might serve as patterns of perceiving the ‘other’ as an enemy and thereby help conflicting parties to rally their followers around exclusivist definitions of identity.

Science can also fail in this regard and perpetuate stereotyped perceptions of the ‘other’ as essentially inimical. This was pointed out by Edward W. Said in his critique of Orientalism.<sup>30</sup> Nowadays, reverse Orientalism, or Occidentalism offers another example of the same.<sup>31</sup> The differentiated debate following Said’s critique of Orientalism as an academic discipline, however, also shows the ability of science to outgrow the circumstantial predilections of its representatives.<sup>32</sup> This project’s focus on science is justified not only with respect to Meyer’s findings about the make-up and function of the global cultural reference frame but also with reference to the intrinsic function of science as a critical force in society.

A third advantage of Meyer’s approach for this project is that the world polity perspective helps to combine empirical findings from the social sciences with findings from cultural studies, ethics, discourse theory and other disciplines. This facilitates our inter-disciplinary cooperation.

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<sup>29</sup> I am using ‘science’ in its broadest meaning – not as in the opposition of science vs. humanities – but embracing natural science as well as the social sciences and the liberal arts. This definition corresponds to the common understanding of the German word ‘Wissenschaft’.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Edward W. Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1978.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Hill, ‘*Asian Values*’, (loc. cit.).

<sup>32</sup> For a summary of the debates on Orientalism cf. Alexander Lyon Macfie. *Orientalism*. London: Longman, 2002; and *Orientalism. A Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.

In its empirical component, the project will focus on three countries, Turkey, Israel / Palestine, and India, in which research trips are planned. The three countries are interesting (1) from a historical perspective as they represent three areas of intense contact of Europe with the Muslim world (the Holy Land for the Middle Ages, Ottoman Turkey for the early modern age, and Mughal India for the time of the European colonial expansion). (2) they are interesting from a conceptual perspective as they all represent areas where the boundaries of Muslim vs. non-Muslim ‘worlds’ are controversial in particular ways. Thus, Turkey negotiates the boundaries between its *laïcité* and its Muslim roots; Israel / Palestine negotiates the delineations between its specific forms of modernity and its respective Jewish or Islamic loyalties; India negotiates its specific form of secularism before the backdrop of a mixed religious heritage, Islam being only one part of it.

The different ‘worlds’ alluded to are bracketed here to suggest that we are not talking of ‘worlds’ in any physical or geographical sense but of semiotic reference frames. These reference frames are not necessarily mutually exclusive and to a certain extent people are free to choose the frame of reference they are most comfortable with, wherever they happen to be located in space and time. By allowing for such multi-centrality, the project undercuts, conceptually, the common misapprehension of geographically defined cultural spheres such as in Huntington’s infamous theory of the incumbent clash of civilisations.

Meyer<sup>33</sup> offers a perspective in which stereotypes can be seen as part of a set of institutions that, following certain cultural patterns, give collective purpose and meaning to actors and actions and integrate them in a larger framework. They are part of what defines possible actors and gives legitimacy to certain of their actions. From this perspective, stereotypes are constructs in that they are part of the social imaginary, which means that they are not natural and unchangeable. But also they cannot be changed at will by any single person or group of actors since they owe their force to their general acceptance in the society. For the most part they are taken so much for granted that a considerable effort is needed to make oneself aware of their operations in the background. This is where culture studies can reciprocate. Philosophy, history, and even fiction, offer techniques of alienation that help to gain a distance from habitual frames of reference and expose their ‘strangeness’ and contingency to the observer.

Social systems like science can hardly be labelled ‘actor’, but they exert an eminent influence on the world polity and the models it has to offer to individual actors like nation states, organisations and individuals. Experts advise individual actors as to who they are, which goals they should pursue and which means they have to employ to achieve them.<sup>34</sup> All these experts appeal to theories that are taken to be globally

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<sup>33</sup> The following is based on Meyer et. al. *Ontologie und Rationalisierung* (loc. cit.).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 111f.

applicable, if not universally valid. The older religious elites have, for the most part, given up the claim that they can show the path in temporal matters. The scientifically informed experts, by contrast, form the new ‘religious’ elite, which consists of professionals, researchers, and intellectuals who show us the path to progress, which is the secular equivalent of salvation in the older context.<sup>35</sup>

With regard to the Pope’s lecture, this new institutionalist framework can help generate interesting questions. What happens, for example, if societies stall in their progress? Does then the modern frame of reference lose its legitimacy in the eyes of society? Do people then revert to pre-modern frames of reference? If yes, then this may be at the root of all that ‘post-modern’ confusion and the resurgence of religion in public life.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, nowadays, even an agent of religion such as the Pope appeals to science and the scientific validity of theology to make it appear like a discipline among others at the modern temple of the university.<sup>37</sup> Does Benedict’s lecture appeal to the validity of theology, as by today’s standards of science, to give it legitimacy as a discipline among others at the university or is he trying to establish an alternative frame of reference in which science ceases to play the dominant role that the modern cultural reference frame assigns to it? The Pope proposes to ‘expand’ scientific rationality into a broader reasoned perspective. One could argue, that such an ‘expansion’ would amount to an abandonment of scientific rationality all together, just as it would make no sense to ‘expand’ logic to license contradiction without abolishing logic all together?<sup>38</sup>

Interestingly, and quite contrary to the explicit intention of the Pope, an analysis<sup>39</sup> of about 120 essays, columns, and opinion articles from leading national and international newspapers and (internet) magazines helps to confirm the *prima facie* incompatibility of religious and scientific rationality. The reason for this may be that the rationality of faith and the rationality of science command mental movements in opposite directions. The believer has to perform an act of ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ i.e. s/he has to operate under the assumption that the religious legacy (revelation) s/he adheres to is absolutely true and good (and possibly beautiful<sup>40</sup>). Even though every believer knows moments of disbelief, the suppression of these doubts count as an act of loyalty towards the legacy (God, the Church etc.). This is especially true of religions where public profession plays a major role, such as Christianity and Islam. Here, as well as in Judaism, a pact between the believer and the God is presumed to exist and the believer is constantly under the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 131.

<sup>36</sup> Many religionists (Christian, Muslim etc.) work on frames of reference that harmonise the precepts of religion with those of modernity.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Ratzinger, *Glaube und Vernunft*, (loc. cit.).

<sup>38</sup> Logic prescribes  $\neg(a \wedge \neg a)$ , theology admits it: Jesus is human and non-human, God is one and not one (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), Mary is a virgin and not a virgin, etc.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Dusche, *Europe and the West*, (loc. cit.).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Navid Kermani. *Gott ist schön. Das ästhetische Erleben des Koran*. München: Beck, 1999.

obligation of proving her/himself worthy of that mutual bond of loyalty by professing it publicly.

Scientific rationality, however, requires a mental move in the opposite direction. The scientist has to operate under the assumption that all commonly held beliefs, including his/her own most favoured theories, are possibly wrong.<sup>41</sup> S/he has to constantly perform acts of ‘willing suspension of belief’, as it were, to maintain her/his open-mindedness towards the phenomena of this world. Both are spiritual exercises that do not come easily. They require constant mental training. A spirit trained in one direction may suffer from mental atrophy in the other direction and vice versa. There are many scientists, however, who are at the same time very religious people, and there are religious leaders who have a great reverence for the spiritual exercise that is science. Thus it seems that both mental capabilities are not mutually conflicting or exclusive.

The Pope, it seems, was little inclined to suspend his belief in the ‘goodness’, ‘truth’, and ‘beauty’ of the Christian legacy when coming to the coherencies between faith, reason, and violence. This explains his propensity to prove his loyalty to that legacy by depicting Catholic Christianity, contrary to commonly acknowledged facts, as the most reasonable and least violent tradition, and to blame irrationality and violence on the ‘other’ and ‘wrong’ creed, which for him is Islam.<sup>42</sup> The suppression of all evidence to the contrary led the Pope to commit many material errors and formal violations of good intellectual practice. This at least is the overwhelming impression that I am left with after reading a few hundred pages of highly measured and even sympathetic commentary on his speech from ‘the Muslim world’. It may not be impossible to be both a good believer and a good scientist. But it is surely very hard to accomplish.

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<sup>41</sup> A famous scientist reported that every morning upon awaking he used to through over board one of his most favoured theorems. This used to keep him young in spirit and open for new discoveries.

<sup>42</sup> Besides Protestantism, Orthodox Christianity, Anglican Christianity, and Secularism.