

**POLITICS AND ESCHATOLOGY: CHRISTIAN, MUSLIM AND LIBERAL
TRADITIONS AND THEIR VISIONS OF HUMANKIND'S FUTURE**

A Dissertation

by

ROBERTO V. LOUREIRO

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2010

Major Subject: Political Science

Politics and Eschatology: Christian, Muslim and Liberal Traditions and Their Visions of
Humankind's Future

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ABSTRACT

Politics and Eschatology: Christian, Muslim and Liberal Traditions and Their Visions of
Humankind's Future. (December 2010)

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Within the context of contemporary politics, Christian, Muslim and Liberal traditions have been, in many instances, at odds with each other regarding how humankind's social political future should be ordered. Such a conflicting condition has been aggravated by the global circulation of democratic ideals, which has significantly disseminated Western liberal values and made those ideals an almost universal desirable social commodity. In support of this argument, one can observe the unprecedented and controversial assumption that liberal democracy has become the ultimate form of political governance. It is in the context of these end-times liberal aspirations, whether self desired or imposed through external pressure, that some competing and conflicting elements are introduced into the political landscape of Christian and Muslim groups. By presenting itself as the universal and final solution for humanity's future, liberalism

appears to create uneasiness among religious people who, indeed, see its secular and religious-privatizing tendencies as a secular eschatological competitor. Despite this perceived end-times conflict, there may be hope for a constructive dialogue among these groups.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Roberto and Norma. Saudades!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, it has become increasingly difficult to agree with critical assessments which suggest that the subject of religion has been ignored, downplayed or simply redefined by analysts when it comes to matters of politics (Marshal 1998). The relationship between religion and politics may have been overlooked or even purposefully misconceived for some time, but, since the beginning of the new century, and more specifically from September 2001 onward, many studies have taken into consideration the intersection of and interaction between these two social institutions.¹ These recent studies have both a local and global emphases. From a local perspective, some approaches have highlighted the political weight of specific religious groups and congregations for public affairs (Sager 2010). In a study about the political life of religious people in America, for instance, Djupe and Gilbert (2009) examined how local organizations determine the political decisions of their members. These authors' overall conclusion is that localized religious agencies are determinant factors in shaping social outlooks which, consequently, exerts decisive influence on their members' broader political opinions and behavior (Djupe and Gilbert 2009, 240-252).

This dissertation follows the style of the *American Political Science Review*.

¹ Cf. Hershberg and Moore (2002); Esposito (2002); Al-Khattar (2003); Cooper (2004).

Conversely, studies have also addressed the interaction between religion and political thought and praxis from a global perspective. Particularly meaningful in these analyses is the growing relevance of Islamism for the Western and Middle Eastern politics (Sheenan 2010). Despite such influence, Robert D. Lee (2010) argues that caution is necessary to avoid exaggeration about the centrality of religion to politics in Middle East countries, for instance. Other issues besides religiosity, Lee notes, also contribute to political changes in those societies. Nevertheless, the author concedes that religious faith is still a key component in the socio-political life of many Muslim groups (Lee 2010, 44). This assertion becomes even more noteworthy regarding these groups' encounters with the West. In general, there is a strong sense among Islamic communities that the international system, dominated in great part by Western powers, is deeply skewed against Muslim societies and their religious views and practices (Ayooob 2005). Whether it is accurate, such perception has triggered several conflicts, which some commentators have attempted to characterize as an inevitable clash of civilizations (Huntington 1993; Berman 2003). Esposito (2002), however, believes that there are substantial misconceptions and exaggerations in these confrontational assessments of the relationship between the West and Islam.²

Despite possible misunderstandings, it is difficult to overlook that the encounter with Western ideas has posed a substantial challenge to some Islamic communities. In several instances, the advances of the West have been described as potentially corrupting, and contemporary efforts to “purge” Muslim societies of these “impurities”

² Esposito (2002) explains that, Huntington, like many others today, played into old stereotypes by characterizing “Islam and the West as age-old enemies ...” (127).

and “accretions” have taken place (Ayoob 2005, 952). Many attempts to rid Islamic countries of Western influence have relied on traditional social, ethnic and cultural rationales. But, as Cook (2005) and Rinehart (2006) have pointed out, there have also been reactions to the West that were noticeably religious and, even more specifically, eschatological in nature. Rinehart (2006), for instance, argues that these reactions are not entirely surprising, since eschatology is the “intellectual mother of all political ideologies. It is the ultimate belief system” (30). As such, end-times expectations are a powerful normative force in unifying a community when it comes into confrontation with undesirable attacks upon its culture and value system. Hence, in the last decades, eschatological thinking has been a relevant factor for Islamic groups by helping them in their dealings with an ever changing world. Muslim eschatological traditions, for example, have been a source of self-preservation for these communities in face of trends such as the “growing secularization, the expanding political power of women, and the increasing liberal culture around the world” (Rinehart 2006, 60). Consequently, in the Middle East - especially after the Six Day’s War when disenchantment and frustration with secular Arab governments increased - those who despise foreign ideas have embraced an apocalyptic rhetoric that favors political action (Furnish 2001).

But Muslims are not alone. Eschatology has also been used by other religious groups in several parts of the world, including in North America, as a means of preserving specific social-cultural ideals and lifestyles. Indeed, the rhetoric used by Jerry Falwell, as he effectively incited the involvement of conservative Christians in American politics in the 1980s, was heavily embedded in a millenarian idiom (O’Leary

1994). Falwell called on Christians to participate in politics to help the nation survive the difficulties of the present situation and “endure until the Lord comes to evacuate His people” (quoted in O’Leary 1994, 179). Falwell’s was not an isolated case. Other apocalyptic writings by American conservative Christians presented a similar nuance. Hal Lindsey, for instance, also argued from an eschatological position that shows, like Falwell’s, a considerable anxiety in preserving the “American way of life” (O’Leary 1994). Such observations seem consistent with the premise that apocalyptic debates are mainly, but not wholly, religious. These preoccupations include economic, social, ecological, political themes and the preservation of a certain lifestyle. In America this understanding takes on even greater meaning because many Christians “refract most if not all of their mundane concerns through the prism of those [eschatological] expectations” (Brummett 1991, 3).

The discussion above gives us a glimpse of how eschatological religious beliefs may interact politically both at the international and local levels. There is, I believe, one final aspect concerning the use of eschatological reasoning that is central to the present study. Eschatology may also be a factor when considering the diffusion of Western values in the democratization process. Indeed, democracy, more than a simple form of governance, has been recently construed as a right of every political community around the globe. As Sen (1999) explains, in the twentieth century, “the idea of democracy became established as the ‘normal’ form of government to which any nation is entitled – whether in Europe, America, Asia, or Africa” (4). The elevation of democracy to the status of an international political right seems to legitimize some triumphant and

controversial claims about the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government (Fukuyama 1992). In Fukuyama's understanding, for instance, the acceptance of Western liberal values is well deserved because, regardless of albeit its problems, liberalism has helped create a world that is fundamentally better than anything previously conceived. Moreover, this perception of the contemporary socio-political landscape paves the way to Fukuyama's eschatologically charged argument that it is difficult to imagine a future in which democracy is not dominant (Fukuyama 1992, 46).

For some, to discuss the spreading of liberal ideals under the general theme of democratization may not hold too much legitimacy because, from a theoretical viewpoint, there is not a necessary connection between democracy and liberalism. Granted, at times, these two political ideals can even be antagonistic (Levine 1981). Andrew Levine, for example, believes that such an amalgamation of liberal and democratic concepts is virtually incoherent or even theoretically irresponsible. Yet Levine acknowledges that, notwithstanding the inconsistencies of bringing together liberalism and democracy, the merger of these two concepts has been one of the most significant experiments in Western political practice (Levine 1981). Now, it is beyond the scope of this work to consider whether the conflation of democracy and liberalism is a successful one. What seems intriguing, however, is that some authors, John Rawls prominently among them, do understand the democratic form of government as the best political environment for the flourishing of liberalism (Rawls 2005, 11).

But even if it is possible to bring democracy and liberalism together, one cannot simply conclude that the spread of democratic governments around the world necessarily seals the victory of liberal ideals. Actually, regarding the recent wave of democratization, it has been argued that in several circumstances the opposite seems to be the norm.³ The rise of illiberal democracies, Zakaria (1997) has suggested, is a “disturbing phenomenon in international life” (22). Illiberal democracies stand in severe contrast with traditional Western liberal democratic systems in which the rule of law, separation of church and state, division of powers and protection of basic civil liberties – among other characteristics – are valued and defended. For this reason, those who perceive the rise of new democracies as something to be praised also understand that more is necessary. The pressing need is the transformation of these incipient democracies into liberal communities, which is the next step in the process of global democratization that should be supported by the international community. In Zakaria’s (1997) words, the role of Western liberal societies is “to consolidate democracy where it has taken root and to encourage the gradual development of constitutional liberalism around the globe” (42).

Thus, while democracy and liberalism are not one and the same, they are not altogether strangers. And, as democracy flourishes and turns into the only possible future for many, the expectation is that the Western liberal style of government should become the prevailing model. If that is the case, I believe that there is the need to address the interplay of liberalism’s possible triumph in light of other traditions

³ Cf. Zakaria (1997); Zakaria (2003).

concerning humankind's future. If assertions about the spreading of liberal values are valid, what are, then, the implications of these assumptions for Christian and Muslim eschatological traditions? Are Christians and Muslims included in political liberalism's vision of the future? Moreover, if Christian and Muslim end-times hopes, as Rinehart (2006) suggests, bear resemblance to political ideologies, can, conversely, political liberalism be perceived as having its own eschatological underpinnings? Finally, how are eschatological assumptions used in religious traditions as ideological weapons against the possible secularizing forces of liberalism?

At first, the suggestion of eschatological nuances in political liberalism may seem highly unusual but, as MacIntyre (1988) has argued, liberalism does not fall outside the category of a tradition and, like other traditions, it has its rational justification, "sacred" texts, disputes over these text's interpretations, social expressions of their beliefs and an hierarchy. It could also be added that, as a tradition, liberalism makes its own claims upon humankind's future. In fact, political liberalism's hopes and expectations about the future seem to carry a considerable eschatological emphasis. Note, for instance, how Fukuyama's following observation appears to betray a substantial eschatological zeal when he affirms that

'[t]he end of history'... is not about the *is*, but about the *ought*: for a variety of *theoretical* reasons, liberal democracy and free markets constitute the best regime, or more precisely the best of the available alternative ways of organizing human societies... It most fully (though not completely) satisfies the most basic human longings, and therefore can be expected to be more universal and more durable than other regimes or other principles of political organization. (Fukuyama 1995, 29)

Fukuyama (1995) eventually admits that liberalism brings to a close neither history nor the historical problem. But in light of the presuppositions embedded in the above affirmation regarding the possible future of humankind, and liberalism's universalistic elements, couldn't this political tradition be considered, for comparative purposes, as having its own eschatological assumptions?

I should make clear that I am not arguing that liberalism *per se* is eschatological or, for that matter, theological. In general, liberal authors are very suspicious of metaphysical religious claims. Nevertheless, as Revering (2005) has explicated about Michael Walzer's political theory, it is possible for political thinkers to be exclusively interested in "worldly questions" while allowing religious or *quasi*-religious arguments to underline their assumptions. In the case of Walzer, for example, some of his Jewish eschatological hopes function as a guide in several of his propositions, chiefly the ones on justice. If this is the case with Walzer's political theory, it may not be entirely unfruitful to look for possible eschatological preoccupations in authors within the liberal tradition, such as Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, and John Rawls, to mention just a few.

Moreover, if liberal authors present us with identifiable eschatological assumptions, one may also ask whether liberalism introduces a competing or even complimentary vision for the future of humankind which, in many instances, conflicts, replaces and expands those expectations put forth by conservative Christians and some Muslim groups. Rawls, for example, insists that religious doctrines, either derived from Christianity or Islam, should not be the "professed basis of society," as they were in

previous centuries (Rawls 2005, 10). The future, as envisioned by Rawls, is paved with political liberalism and it is essentially exclusivist in the sense that any argument that falls outside his concept of “reasonable pluralism” should not be included in political deliberations. For many, such understanding of religion’s future under liberalism outlines the best possible *modus vivendi* for human societies. Yet arguments like the ones held by Rawls are sometimes perceived as possible threats by Christian and Muslims groups. And this notion of a potential challenge from liberalism may feed, in turn, these religious groups’ eschatological fervor. By presenting itself as the universal vision for humanity’s future, liberalism creates uneasiness among religious people who may see its secular and religious-privatizing tendencies as a sign of the “end-times.” In this sense, liberal ideals may be understood not only as parts of a secular eschatology – competing in the marketplace of ideologies against religious end-of-times discourses - but also as the catalyst for the expansion and entrenchment of the apocalyptic zeal of several Christians and Muslims.

The above discussion forms the basis for this dissertation, which proposes the analysis of Muslim and Christian eschatological traditions and their respective interplay with political liberalism. I believe that such study is significant for two main reasons. First, eschatological religious convictions are not simply theological and/or metaphysical preoccupations confined to individuals’ private belief systems. As Watts (2000) points out, “what seem to be mere impersonal predictions about the future are in part projections of spiritual realities and concerns onto the scientific and political arenas” (49). Eschatological propositions can have a considerable impact on how individuals

and communities understand and engage the political realm. Hence, when approaching this debate, it might be helpful to keep in mind Rinehart's conclusion that eschatological notions - though theological in nature – bear significance to politics because

[n]o other set of ideas offers such a compelling message and provides such a powerful tool for influencing the popular mind. It is the definitive articulation of discontent and a powerful unifying force that provides the most effective meaning to popular grievances. Millenarian expectations are inherently normative. As a result they lead to action - to change. It is a guide to action – something all humans require...[a]t the group level, millenarianism is a liberating, galvanizing, and unifying power in the process of broad-based sociopolitical mobilization. This is particularly so in traditional societies that have previously exhibited lengthy and durable patterns of political dormancy, passivity and isolation. (Rinehart 2006, 30)

Second, this dissertation's approach aims to be a unique contribution to political theory by shedding some light on what I perceive as liberalism's eschatological presuppositions about the progress of humankind and history. These liberal assumptions, which, to a certain extent, provide the support to this tradition's views about the future, constitute, I believe, an overlooked layer in liberalism's interaction with some strains of Christianity and Islam. I realize that, by considering political liberalism from an eschatological viewpoint, I venture into a territory that has not been fully explored yet. Nevertheless, such study may generate some interesting clues about another aspect of the contemporary relationship between religion and politics, because, as Walls (2008) observed, "some of the most passionately contested cultural, political, and social conflicts in our world today are rooted in competing eschatological claims" (10). And eschatological claims may take many shapes, including secular ones.

Before I proceed any further, I would like to point out two basic limitations of the present study. First, as already implied, I will confine my discussion to Christianity

and Islam. Of course, these two world religions are far from being the only ones with prominent eschatologies. As I briefly mention in the second chapter of this dissertation, several religious groups have developed, throughout the centuries, substantial end-times beliefs. The Jewish tradition, for instance, has a well-established eschatological system (Novack 2008). In fact, Judaism is considerably influential on Christian and Islamic eschatologies, as it provides them with foundational historical, cultural and cosmological backgrounds. Possibly, one of the most lasting legacies of Jewish eschatology to Christianity and Islam is the hope for a messianic figure, who will bring chronological and ontological closure to human history.⁴

Despite the relevance of the Jewish end-times system, I confine my treatment of the subject to Christianity and Islam because of these traditions' recent eschatological revival and the role that end-times arguments have played in their respective responses to modern political challenges. Indeed, the importance of these propositions to contemporary Christian and Muslim groups has led some commentators to characterize the twentieth century as the "century of eschatology" (Walls 2008, 10). In the case of Islam, for instance, Walls (2008) notes that in the last decades Muslims have become a major force in world politics and several of this group's actions "have often been overtly motivated by eschatological beliefs" (10).

Of course, there is considerable complexity and diversity among the eschatological notions of Christians and Muslims; hence, the second limitation of this

⁴ In the Jewish tradition, as is the case in Christianity and Islam, "the role of the Messiah is essentially political (taken in the deepest sense); he is to both bring and forever maintain the kingdom of God, centering in Jerusalem but extending throughout the whole earth" (Novak 2008, 124).

study. An attempt to cover all aspects, nuances and emphasis in Christian and Islamic eschatologies is beyond the scope and objectives of this dissertation. As my interest here is neither doctrinal nor merely historical, but political, I provide two case studies in order to situate the present discussion within specific and concrete socio-political contexts. Therefore I focus my analysis on two countries, the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran. While I understand that the dissimilarities between America and Iran are considerable, I submit that there are two characteristics consistently shared by these societies concerning the main topic of this dissertation. First, in America as in Iran, the interplay between eschatology and politics has been part of some important socio-historical developments. Second, in contemporary America and Iran, end-times arguments have been applied by conservative religious groups to address, respectively, some of their political apprehensions. These two observations will become evident later, in this prolegomenon and as this study progresses.

In Chapter II of this dissertation, I discuss the concept of eschatology and also outline a working definition of the term. In this pivotal part of this study, I offer more than a simple definition. I also attempt to place the term within its contemporary contextual use, in which I demonstrate that the concept of eschatology transcends its original religious boundaries. Eschatology, in other words, has been primarily used to articulate religious expectations about the future, but, in modern times, the term has also been applied to express ideas, views and speculations in several areas of human knowledge. The range of the term's use has been indeed broad, as it has covered issues in physics, marketing and, most important, politics.

The intersection of eschatology and politics in the American context is discussed in Chapter III, and it represents, for this dissertation's purposes, the Christian perspective. In Christianity, end-times beliefs can be traced to this faith's inception but, as I argue, it is with Augustine of Hippo that religious convictions about the *telos* of humankind become, in the Western Christian tradition, closely associated with political themes. Indeed, Augustine's (1972 [1467]) distinctive treatment of eschatology in his *City of God* has been, for many centuries, the standard understanding of the subject for Christians in the West. In essence, Augustine's views contemplate the utter impossibility of bringing into existence social expectations that can only come to pass in an undetermined, eschatological future. Augustine's denial of a millennium of peace and justice in this present life, for instance, was the normative paradigm that has guided Christian thought on intramundane relationships.

The prevalence of the Augustinian position in Western Christianity about the limitations of the *civitas terrena*, in contrast with the broader possibilities of the *civitas Dei*, lasted until the advent of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. The Reformation marked a substantial change in several of the Bishop's eschatological positions. One of these eschatological shifts relates to the possibility of an earthly millennium, which, again, Augustine vehemently denied. But as heirs of the Reformation, many Puritans believed that such realization could become an attainable reality in New England. For the Puritans, America was to be equated to the New Canaan, the Promised Land, in which the kingdom of God could take place. The glory that would surround the new nation would eventually encompass the entire world

culminating, in Jonathan Edwards' words, with the realization of the "historical millennium" (Edwards 1972, 353).

The Puritan belief in the possible actualization of the eschatological kingdom of God in America came, however, with a price. Such kingdom could only come to pass if the country remained faithful to its original purposes as a unique, chosen Christian nation. It is one of my contentions that a modern form of such belief is still held by several contemporary conservative Christians. For many American Christians, although not all, the Puritan understanding of the country as a millennium nation remains an authentic perception. This view of America is one reason why some conservative religious leaders rely on eschatological rhetoric to remind the country of its place in God's plans. Like the Puritans, conservative Christians today associate the nation's social and political conditions with its future role in humankind's destiny. Thus, as I suggest, more than mere anxiety about end-times matters, the fusion of eschatological rhetoric with political views is also a means to condemn influences that are secularizing the country and subverting its original "Christian outlook."

But the blending of political themes and eschatological convictions extends to other social contexts quite diverse from the one found among conservative Christians in America. As I argue in Chapter IV, there is also, among Muslim communities, a propensity to interpret and depict several politically charged events from an eschatological perspective. Undoubtedly, there are many key end-times elements in Islamic eschatology that bear significance to socio-political issues among Muslims. However this chapter's focus is on a hope that embodies the essence of this religious

group's eschatological expectations, i.e., the coming of the Islamic Messiah, the *al-Mahdi*.⁵ Indeed, if one maintains some appropriate distinctions, it can be affirmed that the hopes associated with the Mahdi are central to the eschatology of individuals in several Muslim communities around the globe. But, as I point out, it is Iran that represents a remarkable case study on Muslim messianic eschatology in recent times.

In Iran, especially during the watershed events surrounding the Islamic revolution, messianic eschatological propositions made a marked political impact. Mahdism, as several commentators indicated, was one of the major components used by the Iranian clergy in order to give legitimization to the *coup d'état* headed by Ayatollah Khomeini.⁶ Khomeini's success in reinserting religion as a normative factor in Iran's political life was achieved in great part by his re-interpretation of certain well-established notions about the role of the *ulama* in regards to the Imam Mahdi. Simply stated, Khomeini put forth the idea that Shia clerics, as legitimate representatives of the Mahdi, had the right to assume temporal political power, if the circumstances required.

If Mahdism lost some of its prominence in Iranian politics a few years after the revolution, it has made a remarkable comeback with the ascension to power of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Ahmadinejad, who has been a controversial figure, mainly because of his steadfast advocacy of Iran's right to nuclear power, is also known for his outspokenness concerning the arrival of the Imam Mahdi. In general, the Iranian president's Mahdism outlines an optimistic expectation for the future, which underscores

⁵ "...a uniquely Islamic eschatology" is "centered in the Hidden Imam [Mahdi]" who will "return on the Day of Judgment to restore justice on earth" (Aslan 2005, 186).

⁶ Cf. Tucker (2008); Arjomand (1988).

the substance of the Islamic eschatological hope for justice and equality to all peoples. But, as I indicate, Ahmadinejad's Mahdism is also a means to counteract Western attempts to influence the Middle East. The impact of Ahmadinejad's eschatological beliefs in Iranian politics is still an open question, but lately commentators have become increasingly concerned with his messianic rhetoric (Naji 2008; Roy 2008).

In Chapter V, I approach the question of a liberal eschatology. In this chapter, I highlight some of the views from Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, and Francis Fukuyama. My purpose in considering these authors is to show that an eschatological outlook in liberalism is not an implausible proposition. In fact, such an approach reveals, for instance, that these liberal authors have a considerable preoccupation and interest in the future of humankind's political development. In Kant, this concern is revealed in his discussion of universal evil, and the possible remedies for this problem in human society. One of Kant's hopes is the realization of the ethical commonwealth, which he equates with the implementation of a kingdom of God on earth through human efforts. In the case of Mill, there is severe apprehension about the negative implications of supernatural eschatology to humankind's moral integrity, because, for the liberal thinker, these religious convictions lead to selfishness and complacency. Hence, Mill labors to substitute these metaphysical beliefs with his own eschatological vision, *via* the Religion of Humanity. For Mill, such replacement would produce enduring beneficial moral results. The last author discussed in this chapter is Francis Fukuyama. Fukuyama's arguments have been very controversial, but his suggestion that liberal democracy is the final chapter in an ideological battle has struck a chord. For my

purposes in this chapter, Fukuyama's postulation about the final victory of liberalism is relevant because it represents an interesting case of a secular realized-eschatology.

In this dissertation's conclusion, Chapter VI, I analyze the interaction of the Christian, Muslim and liberal eschatological perspectives, as discussed in previous chapters, by offering three concluding observations. First, it is my understanding that eschatological views contribute to the tension between liberalism and religious traditions, especially in America. Essentially, I argue that, in the case of America, Christians perceive that the liberal vision for the country's future is displacing what they consider to be its original outlook as a millennium nation. Conservative Christians fear, for instance, that, if such is allowed to happen, the country will become morally and spiritually weak, which could have negative consequences for America itself and the entire world. The second conclusion focuses on the international impact of liberalism and this tradition's interaction with Islamic eschatological hopes in Iran. Resistance to liberal ideals seems to vary from one socio-political context to another, but it is my claim that, as is suggested by the Iranian case, one form of such resistance relies on end-times propositions, such as the growing expectation for the coming of the Mahdi. Third, I finish this chapter on an optimistic and positive note. If the interaction of these three traditions is marked by conflicting positions about the future of humankind, there is a need to discover a common ground upon which these groups can develop a dialogue. I believe that one common element that underscores all three eschatological traditions is a desire to reach a final resolution to humankind's suffering and injustices. In fact, the

preoccupation with humankind's future indicates that there may be hope for a better understanding among individuals within these groups.

CHAPTER II

DEFINING ESCHATOLOGY

The concern with the future is a universal one, and attempts to predict and control it can be observed in several human communities and societies (Pannenberg 1984; Mesquita 2009). Perhaps one of the indications of this interest in the future is the presence of eschatological related preoccupations in diverse religious groups, cultural and social settings throughout history. For instance, sacred concepts of eschatology are noticeable in distinct communities such as the Aztecs, Buddhists, Hindus, and in all major Abrahamic faiths.⁷ Concurrently, eschatology - as an expression of concern with future events, and the impact they may have upon the human species, the planet and the environment - transcends religious boundaries.

Indeed there is a considerable amount of contemporary literature that applies end-times terminology, albeit its use has a non-religious function. When eschatology is approached from a secular perspective, it is possible to observe, for instance, that the concept has been employed in physics, in areas of research such as *Physics Eschatology* (Cirkovic 2003) and *Relativistic Eschatology* (Jackelén 2006). Eschatological approaches are also found in unexpected fields as *Marketing* (Woodruffe 1997; Brown, Bell and Carson 1996), *Computer Technology* (DeLashmutt 2006), and *Communication*.

⁷ Cf. Read (1986); King (1986); Nattier (2008); Milner (1993); Baumgartner (1999).

(Ramsey 1997). Of course, political theory is not unfamiliar territory to the concept either.⁸ Several authors have discussed the importance and use of eschatological ideas for political studies (Tinder 1965; Christoyannopoulos and Milne 2007; Webb 2008 ; Pocock 1970; Revering 2005). With such a widespread use, the major difficulty, at this point, is the definition of the term itself (Rippin 1996; Milner 1993). While problematic, the meaning of eschatology cannot be disregarded because, for this work's purpose, it is important to come to a clear understanding of what it means. In this chapter I will explore some of these uses of the term as they intersect with my purpose of arriving at a definition that encompasses both the sacred and the secular. Only then it will be possible to suggest an analysis of political ideologies, either religious or secular, from an eschatological perspective.

In the next paragraphs I will highlight the use of the term eschatology in diverse contexts. First, I will start with an assessment of the concept within its original religious setting. As one of the focal points of this work is the Muslim and Christian understanding of the subject, I will limit the term's religious discussion to these two faiths. Note that it is not my intention to approach every single element of these traditions' eschatological views. Undoubtedly, themes such as the last day, resurrection, and final judgment are all related to the term. Yet these issues will only be approached to the extent that they help in achieving a general definition of eschatology. Thus, there will not be any in depth analysis or evaluation of these doctrinal issues here. In the

⁸ The subject of eschatology is not a novelty in political writing. Hobbes, for instance, dedicated considerable space in "Leviathan" to the subject (Hobbes 1994 [1668], 245-410). Hobbes mainly focused his discussion on matters of death, resurrection and after life (Cf. Overhoff 2000).

second part of this chapter, I will discuss the term's use outside the boundaries of Islam and Christianity. In other words, I will look at the concept of eschatology as it has been applied to areas of study which are not religious or sacred. As I survey the secular use of the term, it is important to keep in mind that an overall grasping of its meaning, beyond its traditional religious setting, is essential for a broader definition of the concept.

But, the answer to the question “what does eschatology mean?” is not a simple one (Borg 1994; Rowland 2008). Etymologically, the term comes from the Greek word *ἔσχατος* which literally refers to the study of the *eschata*, simply translated as “last things” (Bauer 1957; Liddel and Scott 1948).⁹ In a broad sense, eschatology can be understood as “the study of the final end of things,” these *things* being related to the entire creation – when it is used in a religious context - or cosmos (Rowland 2008, 4).¹⁰ Conversely, from a narrow standpoint, eschatology can merely refer to the advent of one's death. As Sauter (1988) explains, “[i]n the last analysis the *eschata* constitute the definite boundary of human existence for which words and deeds count” (500). Hence eschatology may be applied to describe elements concerning both the cosmos' transient aspect and an individual's mortality.

Undoubtedly, “the final end of things” and “death” - with all the elements associated with those events such as the last day, final judgment, resurrection, etc - are the primary and the most prevalent ideas embedded in eschatology when the term is used with a religious emphasis (Bijlefeld 2004; Smith and Haddad 1981; Hart 2008). In Islam

⁹ “The term ‘eschatology’ (*eschatologia*) stems from its use in Philipp Heinrich Friedlieb's *Dogmatics* (1644), followed by Abraham Calov in his voluminous *Systema locorum Theologicorum* (1655-77)” (Sauter 2008, 248).

¹⁰ Cf. Dohm (2003); Webb (2008).

and Christianity, for instance, these two elements mark what can be called a *break* with the present state of affairs (Bijlefeld 2004). Such an eschatological break, or rupture, puts an end to the ongoing process of ordinary human history, especially when the cosmological aspect is considered. Note that, in both traditions, the end of history associated with the *eschaton* is not without a *telos*.¹¹ In essence, Christian and Islamic teachings on end-times emphasize a discontinuity with the present - by an ultimate act of Divine intervention – which will bring forth the final judgment, resurrection of the body and re-creation of the cosmos. The *telos* or purpose of all these events is the creation of a new order in which nature and humankind are put in a cosmological and social state of utter harmony (Pannenberg 2008, 220; Smith and Haddad 1981). Putting it simply, eschatology, in Muslim and Christian traditions, affirms that history, as it has been known, will end and a new reality will be set into motion in an indeterminate future. While such generalization is helpful to grasp the overall meaning of the term in these two religious traditions, a closer examination is also necessary to highlight the importance of other eschatological elements for both groups.

Eschatology in Islam

In the Muslim tradition, specifically, eschatology plays a substantial role in its belief system (Chittick 1987; Rippin 1996). This importance is far from accidental. Islamic faith in Allah and His Messenger is inherently interconnected with giving

¹¹ “...it is important to understand that eschatology is not only a temporal concept, but a teleological one as well” (Rowland 2008, 4).

credence to the Last Day and/or the Day of Judgment. The following reference from the Qur'an illustrates this close relationship:

O you who have believed, believe in Allah and His Messenger and the Book that He sent down upon His Messenger and the Scripture which He send down before. And whoever disbelieves in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day has certainly gone far astray. (Qur'an 1983, 4: 136)

In this passage, the need to be faithful to Allah, the Book and the Messenger (as a clear reference to the prophet Muhammad) is situated in the same context with belief in the Last Day. These beliefs are, in a final analysis, all intertwined and inseparable. In fact, as Hermansen (2008) points out, Islamic theologians essentially affirm that the Last Day “is among the three most fundamental Islamic doctrines,” namely the unity and uniqueness and oneness of God (*tawhid*), prophecy (*nubuwwa*) and the ultimate “return” [*ma'ad*] (309).

The passage above is not an isolated case of eschatological thinking in the Qur'an. A cursory reading of Islam's Holy Book will reveal that it speaks about end-times events more than any other sacred scripture (Chittick 2008; Smith and Haddad 1981).¹² Hence, as one considers the centrality of the Qur'an for this religious group, it is more than apparent that Muslims are, of necessity, members of a community that is deeply concerned with eschatological issues. Furthermore, the Hadith, which is a body of Islamic prophetic teachings that bears a great significance for Muslims practices, also reinforces this faith's eschatological foundation (Hermansen 2008).

¹² “The promise, the guarantee, of the day at which all bodies will be resurrected and all persons called to account for their deeds and the measure of their faith is the dominant message of the Qur'an as it is presented in the context of God's *tawhid*. One can find testimony of this assurance on almost every page of the Qur'an” (Smith and Haddad 1981, 63).

Having said that, it is still necessary to answer the question “what is the meaning of *eschatology* in Islam?” In this religious tradition, the word that commonly stands for eschatology is *ma’ad*, which can be simply translated as “a place to which one returns” or simply “to return” (Chittick 2008). Several authors¹³ agree that the central theme of Muslim eschatology is the idea of *return*, as it is implied in the following Qur’anic passage:

My Lord hath commanded justice; and that ye set your whole selves (to Him) at every time and place of prayer, and call upon Him, making your devotion sincere as in His sight: such as He created you in the beginning, so ye shall *return*.
([emphasis added] Qur’an 1983, 7:29)

The *return* to Allah, suggested in this passage, marks a definite break with the present historical reality which introduces events that will lead to the final triumph of the forces of good over the evil ones (Hermansen 2008). Moreover, this suggestion of a *return* is of a personal or collective nature; or even of a voluntary or compulsory character, underlining the pervasive Qur’anic proposition that all creation will be coming back to its Originator. The Qur’anic understanding of such *return* is primarily of an otherworldly character, for it ultimately points to its completion in the life to come. Nevertheless, Muslim eschatology does not preclude the hope or desire for a just and ethical life still in this present existence, in light of what lies ahead in an undetermined future (Hermansen 2008). This final observation needs to be kept in view as one tries to understand the concept of Islamic eschatology from a political theory perspective.

It is indeed necessary to comprehend that eschatology, in Islam, does deal with

¹³ Cf. Chittick (1987); Chittick (2008); Hermansen (2008).

the end of the cosmos, death and the life to come, but it also relates to existence in this world, with ethics, jurisprudence, philosophy and even politics (Surty 1986; Haleem 1995). As Chittick (1987) explains, for Muslims, politics “which describes the ideal human society and the means to achieve it, can be considered a branch of eschatology, since man’s temporal good can be understood only in terms of this eternal good” (379). Therefore, in Islam, eschatology can be defined as a belief in a rupture with the present life that will lead to a *return* of every person and all things to the One who created them. But as one prepares to return to the Creator, the exhortation to live an upright life which hopes for justice, at social and political levels, is also an integral part of the Muslim eschatological expectation even for this world.

Eschatology in Christianity

Eschatology is also an important concept in the Christian tradition. And it constitutes not only an essential element in this religion’s belief system, but a crucial factor to any credible attempt to understand Christian thought as well (Rowland 2008; Mostert 2002). As is the case in Islam, Christian eschatological tenets include some major themes such as judgment, death and resurrection (Sauter 2008; Phan 2008; Louth 2008). All these elements suggest that, in its core, the meaning of eschatology, in the Christian tradition, is closely related to its etymology. Eschatology then refers to a set of beliefs related to end-times expectations or, simply put it, the term has to do with the study of the last things (Rowland 2008; Arnold 2008). Yet such a simple definition based on the word’s original signification will not do. Although the word’s etymology

may emphasize the concept's essential meaning in Christian thought, it does not bring out some important nuances, because the idea of eschatology can be quite fluid, and it may refer to the study of last things *only* in a very broad manner (Arnold 2008; Baumgartner 1999).

The most obvious limitation of a definition associated with its etymology is that it shrouds, for instance, one of the critical aspects of the Christian eschatological thought, the suggestion of a *new beginning*. As the Swiss theologian Karl Barth writes,

Last *things*, as such, are not *last* things, however great and significant they may be. He only speaks of *last* things who would speak of the *end* of all things, of their end understood plainly and fundamentally, of a reality so radically superior to all things, that the existence of all things would be utterly and entirely *based* upon it alone, and thus, in speaking of their end, he would in truth be speaking of nothing else than their beginning. (Barth 1933, 110)

Thus, for Barth, Christian eschatology cannot be defined around the idea of last things *only*, because, in most of this tradition's discussion on the subject, there is a vital tension between the *end* and the *beginning*. In this sense, the meaning of eschatology transcends the suggestion of end-times by pointing to a new beginning which, for Barth, is even more significant than the idea of the *end* itself. Therefore, the Christian understanding of the term presents itself with a crucial dialectical aspect: the end is also the beginning. Once this connection between end-times and a new beginning is established, Moltmann's argument, that the central characteristic in the concept of eschatology is the *hope* for the inauguration of a new reality, becomes essential.¹⁴

¹⁴ For Moltmann, the theme of eschatology is hope. This hope, according to him, is of an essential political nature (Moltmann 1965).

This eschatological hope concerning a new order of things is of considerable political importance (Webb 2008; Gutierrez 1973). Even though the *new beginning* primarily points to otherworldly expectations, many Christian groups have also interpreted this hope as a powerful call to action for the transformation of social, economic and political processes in the present historical existence.¹⁵ In other words, for a considerable number of Christians, eschatology does not refer exclusively to end-times or otherworldly realities which will be established *after* certain events associated with the last days come to pass. On the contrary, groups such as the Puritans, German Pietists and American conservative Christians have developed a concept of eschatology that hopes for new social and political orders now (Clouse 2008; Sauter 2008). As Sauter explains, such an eschatological ideal has emerged from time to time, in Christianity, as a

...contrast to the present state of affairs in the church and the state or in the endeavor to reform spirituality and morality or in the longing for the divine, healing powers in order to overcome the miseries of sickness, hunger exploitation, war, injustice, and discord. (Sauter 2008, 252)

Thus, the meaning of eschatology, in the Christian tradition, should include not only its ubiquitous end-times aspect, but it also needs to assert a hopeful expectation that a better future is possible in this life.

In sum a definition of eschatology, whether in the Christian or Muslim tradition, should include the essential break with the present historical process that will lead to a new order of reality. This break or rupture is fundamentally related to otherworldly

¹⁵ Some versions of eschatology can be classified as “political eschatology” for they are, in fact, “related very concretely to the social, economic and political conditions in which the majority of people in the world live” (Mostert 2002, 15). Cf. also Gutierrez (1973); Braaten (1975).

expectations, as is the case with the Islamic concept of *return* to Allah and the Christian belief in a *new beginning*. Such expectations are clearly stated in these traditions' emphasis on some common elements such as death, final judgment and resurrection. But the break with the historical process may also point to a hope for the future in this present existence. While such expectation may seem somewhat paradoxical, it is an integral part of the eschatological concept in both traditions. Eschatological hope, for Muslims and Christians, is not related to the realm of otherworldly or end-time events *only*.¹⁶ In fact, a definition of eschatology that just denotes concern with *last things*, as they relate to extramundane affairs, should be resisted since most scholars

...reject this narrow interpretation of the term and see it as applicable to statements regarding the world to come and the last day(s) as well as pronouncements regarding *decisive turning points at a future date within the ongoing history of this world* ([emphasis added] Bijlefeld 2004, 36).

Hence, a definition of eschatology in Muslim and Christian traditions might be as follow: a hope or belief that history will eventually come to a break, or rupture, that will lead to a series of events that will bring about a new reality either in this life or in the world to come. While this definition is broad and does not include some of the specific elements of these religious eschatological traditions, such as final judgment and resurrection, it maintains the essence of the term's meaning. Moreover, such a definition also leaves the concept open to include other uses that fall outside the religious settings.

¹⁶ "...eschatology as individual and as otherworldly is too narrow..." (Arnold 2008, 24). Cf. also Sauter (1999).

Eschatology in Secular Thought

At this point in the discussion about the meaning of eschatology, it is also important to consider how the term has been applied outside the religious boundaries of Christianity and Islam. The central rationale for such extra-religious inquiry about the expression relates to the simple observation that, albeit its religious roots, the term's use has extended to other fields of study as well. From the outset, such observation suggests that the eschatological concept may have acquired a considerable flexibility of meaning as it navigated from a religious setting to a secular one. For instance, concerning Plato's myths, some commentators argue that eschatology is an important aspect in the philosopher's teachings because these parables bring out issues that deal with death and judgment of the soul (Ward 2002; Campos 2005). Yet, unlike religious eschatology, Plato's myths do not emphasize themes associated with the end of the world *per se*. Plato is more interested in a personal *eschaton*, in contrast with a cosmic one. In his eschatological writings, Plato's primary concern is the individual and his actions in society, which have an ultimate impact in the *afterlife*. Simply put, the philosopher's eschatological myths have in sight the promotion of a moral upright social life through visions of what will happen to an individual after he dies (Ward 2002).

This emphasis on the effect of intramundane existence in the life to come can be noted in one of Plato's (2003) eschatological myths discussed in the final paragraphs of the *Republic*, the myth of Er. In this parable, a man called Er dies in battle, but his body does not decompose, he goes to heaven and eventually is revived to tell about his journey to the afterlife. Issues of justice and judgment are addressed in Er's report,

which seems to indicate that Plato's central preoccupation, in this myth, is with the impact of one's earthly behavior on the soul's future. To be even more specific, Plato's interest here is in how an individual's actions in this life play a role in his soul's process of reincarnation (Ward 2002). In the Greek philosopher's understanding, this consideration is relevant because, as Ruether (1990) suggests, "[t]hrough reincarnation, souls work their way to higher states of consciousness and higher classes of humans..." (115). Thus in the philosopher's thought, eschatological teachings concerning death and the afterlife do not have a religious application, but moral and pedagogical ones, which highlights the role of ethics in Plato's eschatological teachings (Bouchard 2000, 91).¹⁷

This brief discussion regarding Plato's myth shows that the concept of eschatology is not restricted to its traditional religious boundaries. Nevertheless, while Plato's concerns may not be religious *per se*, it still carries an undeniable metaphysical nuance. In the philosopher's parables, the eschatological perspective is still used to illustrate realities that transcend this world. Can, however, eschatology be applied and defined in such a way that makes it relevant to ideas that are not metaphysical in nature? The answer to this question is important because one of the goals of this work is to bring liberalism, a secular ideology, into an eschatological discussion. Thus, once again, can the term be used in contexts with no metaphysical emphasis whatsoever?

Pannenberg (2008) points out that the use of eschatological ideas to address interests and concerns of a secular nature is not only possible but it has already occurred

¹⁷ See Campos' (2005) *Escatología y Retórica en los Diálogos Platónicos* for a more detailed discussion on the eschatological aspect of Plato's myths.

as well. The author suggests that, despite their religious roots, Immanuel Kant and G.W.F. Hegel, for instance, preferred to deal with eschatology not in its traditional religious sense but in a secularized manner. It is Pannenberg's argument that Kant's perfect ethical order, envisioned for the future, had strong religious elements but

...his moral vision of history and of its future completion exhibits a secularized version of Christian eschatology without a resurrection of the dead and with a purely moral conception of a future kingdom of God. (Pannenberg 2008, 495)

Hegel ultimately intensifies this Kantian secularization of the concept by affirming a "realized eschatology" in which human freedom, expected by religious traditions to be achieved in its fullness only in an otherworldly future, had already been obtained. The remarkable point in Pannenberg's discussion, regarding these authors' views, is the suggestion that some of the elements that are present in Kant's *secularized eschatology* and Hegel's *realized eschatology* have found their way into what can be called a Western liberal eschatology. Such liberal conception, which is secular in its essence, exhibits "a form of realized eschatology with regards to the Western nations, while 'freedom and democracy' hold out the eschatological promise to the rest of humankind" (Pannenberg 2008, 496).

Whether the term is used with a religious or secular emphasis, it starts to become evident that eschatology, as a concept, can be applied widely in many different contexts. This flexibility seems to be related to the term's acquired metaphorical meaning (Crossan 1999). In several instances eschatology, as a metaphor, still maintains the basic idea concerning things that are in the future and final. Yet, as Borg (1994) explains, eschatology can also be used "metaphorically in a non-end-of-the-world sense;

as a nuanced synonym for ‘decisive,’ or as ‘world-shattering,’ or to point to the *telos* of entering history but not in such a way as to end history” (8-9). Such metaphorical meaning has granted the term a significant interdisciplinary treatment. Two examples of this application of the term should suffice.

In the first example, eschatology, as a metaphor, is used to address issues in natural physics. In his article “Physical Eschatology,” Cirkovic (2003) points out that as long as predictions keep playing a major role in scientific methodology, arguments about the destiny of the universe, or the cosmological future, will be pivotal in physical sciences. Central to these studies is the fate of Earth and the Solar System, which has generated a unique field called Physical Eschatology. Cirkovic (2003) simply defines this field of study as “the most recent expression of the ancient desire of humanity to learn about the future” (122). Certainly, this is a terse definition. Yet the important point is not whether Physical Eschatology is exhaustively defined. This example’s significance lies in the concept being used and applied by physicists to describe *natural phenomena* that fall outside the traditional or etymological use of the word.¹⁸ Here, the meaning of eschatology does not bear any religious or metaphysical connotation. It is simply used to express an interest in *decisive future events* that fall within the realm of physics.

¹⁸ Eschatology was used for the first time in physics by Martin Rees (1969), in his *The Collapse of the Universe: an eschatological study*. In this study, Rees, who was the President of the Royal Society of London for the Improvement of Natural Knowledge, discusses the expansion and re-expansion of the universe and its possible collapse. Though Rees never defines in his article what he means by eschatology, it is clear that he is using it as a metaphor concerning the possible disintegration of the universe by natural forces.

The second example is Woodruffe's *Eschatology, Promise, Hope: the Utopian Vision of Consumer Research* (1997). Here the term is applied in a marketing context.¹⁹ In his study, Woodruffe indicates that a definition of eschatology should not be limited to the study of the endings. Rather the term can and should be used to express a focus on the "future," or even "new dimensions" concerning events to come. Interestingly, Woodruffe suggests that instead of looking at eschatology as designating the end of times or things, it should be understood as *the opening to the future* of new possibilities, as one makes a decisive break with the past. In this sense, for the author, eschatology leaves its original traditional negative aspect and assumes an optimistic perspective concerning new times and possibilities. Furthermore, Woodruffe argues that such an understanding ultimately promotes a "liberating view of eschatology," which emphasizes two of its most important elements: *promise* and *hope* regarding the future (Woodruffe 1997, 667). Note that despite of Woodruffe's unorthodox use of eschatology, he still manages to maintain some of the term's original religious nuances such as hope for the future. The break with the past, also emphasized by the author, opens up the term to illustrate new, positive and optimistic perspectives for the future. These perspectives can assume a secular sense because it addresses issues of a commercial, social or political kind.

It is uncertain when precisely the term eschatology developed such a widespread metaphorical meaning. But Horton (2000) indicates that since the eighteenth century the understanding of eschatology, as an expression that affirms the world's end and

¹⁹ For a discussion on how the term found its way into the marketing context, see Brown, Bell and Carson (1996).

recreation in the molds of Islamic and Christian traditional views, has disintegrated. Pannenberg (2008), for instance, points out that in several of its modern secular uses, eschatology is construed not as a concept that outlines an ultimate vision of a new created order established by Divine intervention, but as a term that promotes the idea that a better future should be brought about through human effort. Arnold also comments on this anthropocentric view of eschatology and suggests that such a perception has been the prevalent view in many contemporary circles. He observes that, for many, eschatology “is expressed in hopeful promises or expectations of a brighter future, especially if that future is said to be achieved by means of human progress” (Arnold 2008, 24). Perhaps a brief consideration of Friedrich Nietzsche’s view of the future is instructive here. Nietzsche has been an influential figure in putting forth the idea that history does not need to have a Divine purpose, which, according to some commentators, renders his eschatology essentially secular.²⁰

For Nietzsche, if the future is to have a *telos*, it should be brought about not by Divine intervention but by human beings themselves. This secular belief in an anthropocentric *telos* comes across in his well-known statement: “that my life has no aim is evident from the accidental nature of its origin; that I can posit an aim for myself is another matter” (Nietzsche 1954, 39).²¹ As Ausmus (1978) explains, in his *Nietzsche and Eschatology*, such a view highlights the humanistic nature of Nietzsche’s

²⁰ Cf. Horton (2000); Ausmus (1978). While having a secular view of history, Nietzsche believed that salvation could be found in the future. “Eschatology is therefore not merely the ultimate end of *Heilsgeschichte*, but eschatology and *Heilsgeschichte* are identical...” (Ausmus 1978, 349).

²¹ Horton (2000) argues that Nietzsche’s view on the subject is essentially a-theological. Yet, it can be argued that, while not metaphysical, Nietzsche’s eschatology has a *telos* but it is essentially an anthropocentric one.

eschatological outlook since any expectation about the future is marked by the “fulfillment of a hope brought about through the individual’s own striving and not by inevitability” (349). Nietzsche’s eschatology is not only anthropocentric, but it is also utterly earthly-bound because, as an ultimate goal, human beings should transform themselves, preferably in this present existence. Such an intramundane expectation comes across in his *Gay Science*, when the philosopher suggests that it may not be possible for human beings to escape this existence by entering into a metaphysical bliss. Rather, in his existential version of “eternal recurrence,” Nietzsche (2001) seems to argue that a person may have to coexist with the reality of having to live this life “innumerable times again” (35). In Nietzsche’s view, the new coming world order may never arrive and, within this perspective, human beings may have to design their own future in this existence (Hatab 2005).

In Nietzsche’s “new world,” resurrection, for example, takes a new form. It does not denote a life after death, as resurrection is traditionally understood, but it suggests a preoccupation with the “true life” on one’s own body (Ausmus 1978, 360). In this respect, Nietzsche’s eschatology is undoubtedly non-transcendent and, again, anthropocentric, for it points to the incompleteness of the present human experience while it hopes for a more wholesome predicament in the future. Yet, all this should happen in this present life through human effort. Such a view makes eschatology essentially a means to self-understanding, for it will reveal, in terms of future expectations, what is most essential to one’s vision of either individual or social need.

As Nietzsche's views about the future suggest, a metaphorical use of the eschatology can be divested of its original religious meaning by stressing not the Divine purpose for human history, but a possible construction of a better future by humankind itself. Thus, a definition of eschatology does not need to incorporate all the metaphysical elements found in a religious characterization of the term. In fact, by approaching the expression from an anthropocentric perspective, eschatology is free to express the expectation and hope regarding the future not only of souls, in the afterlife, but of societies, communities, environment, economy and even political institutions, within the present reality.

The link between political institutions and a concept of eschatology is suggested, for instance, by Christoyannopoulos and Milne (2007) in *Love, Justice and Social Eschatology*. These authors argue that, in modern life, human beings seek to fulfill their destiny as individuals and as community within political institutions. The contemporary goal of these institutions is a normative one because they embody the strife to implement social systems that are increasingly preoccupied with justice. This struggle for a just political and social order has an eschatological dimension because the promise of a better civilization is not yet a present reality, it can only fit within the future, as people work towards the realization and actualization of humankind's goal of living in social harmony. It is this ultimate normative goal that gives political institutions an eschatological dimension. The drive for an ethical society pushes human beings forward and such a vision is an eschatological one, in which the ultimate goal - or its *telos* - is justice.

Hence, presently, the concept of eschatology, in some secular settings, can be applied to describe changes in the course of history that is achieved not by an outside Divine intervention but by humankind itself in its desire to alter life in the future. In such eschatological perspective, the central theme is the hope of attaining a more just and harmonic future within the intramundane social, ecological, economic and political environments.²² Understood in this manner, the term acquires a nuanced secular meaning that consists of a strong sense of responsibility “in the face of the future one hopes for others,” while maintaining some of the elements of a religious-defined eschatology, such as the break with the past in the hope of a better, more just future and *telos* (Lévinas 1969, 5).

Conclusion

But at this juncture in this chapter the question that still needs to be answered is: what does eschatology mean? Or even more precisely, what does an operational definition of eschatology that includes the term’s essential meanings, in religious and non-religious settings, look like? Taking into consideration the above discussion, it may be argued that a definition of eschatology needs to reflect three essential elements which appear pivotal to all perspectives presented, namely, a *decisive break with the present, hope and telos*. Note that these three elements appear, in one form or another, in both the religious and the secular understandings of eschatology. Hence, whether one has a

²² In this case, hope does not need the “end” to be realized, for hope is the faculty to apprehend the future, in the present. Hope that probes the future in search of alternatives for our present existence is not ultimate (Mendes-Flohr 1983).

religious belief in a Divine future intervention, or the assumption that through humankind's own effort a better socio-political order can be achieved; there is a strong sense that, for this change to occur, a break with the present state of affairs is necessary. A definition of eschatology that take these three elements into consideration can be as follow: *eschatology is the understanding, either of a religious or secular nature, that a decisive break with the present state of affairs is necessary in the hope that such a rupture is going to bring about changes that, ultimately, has as its telos a new world order which is marked by justice, peace and socio-political stability.* In light of this definition, I will proceed with my discussion on the Christian, Muslim and Liberal traditions, respectively, as they attempt to implement their visions for the future of humankind.

CHAPTER III

POLITICS, ESCHATOLOGY

AND CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS IN AMERICA

As I briefly indicated in this study's introduction, the relationship between Christianity and eschatology is a very extensive and complex subject. It would be utterly impossible to survey, within this chapter, every single aspect, trend, and position on the matter at hand. An exhaustive attempt to cover this issue would prove not only counterproductive, but it would also fall outside the scope of the present discussion. My aim here is not to address all the connections, relationships, nuances and implications of eschatological thinking in the Western Christian tradition. Rather, this chapter's focus is on the investigation of how eschatology interacted with, and still influences, the political thought of conservative Christians in the United States.²³

Despite the focus of this chapter, it is not without importance to set the present discussion against a broader historical background. To that end, in the next paragraphs, I

²³ In this study I will avoid the use of terms such as "fundamentalist" and "evangelicals" to describe this group of Christians since there seems to be little agreement on these nomenclatures' meaning (Greeley and Hout 2006). In this work I will follow Greeley and Hout's (2006) definition of conservative Christians, who, according to these authors, "seek a religious practice consistent with a relatively small group of basic principles that are rooted in scripture," and perceive themselves as heirs of the sixteenth century Reformation (2). Some of the central characteristics of this group are their emphasis on the literal meaning of the Bible, rebirth and reaching out to others. Conservative Christians and their Afro-American partners in faith are, Greeley and Hout explain, "the real dissenters in America – some, no doubt, more than others. Dissent permeates their core beliefs, their worldviews, their morality, their relationship with God, and their devotions. It is not a fashionable dissent but rather a stern, consistent, and determine dissent" (37).

will first approach Augustine's eschatological thought, as it was, for centuries, the standard Christian position on the subject. Later, I will discuss the adaptation and modification of Augustine's views by the English Reformers, and also how such an adjustment influenced the Puritans' position on the issue, which, in turn, set a pattern for contemporary conservative Christians' own understanding of eschatology and politics. Before I proceed, there is the need for one final observation. Once more, the subject is vast and it can be quite unyielding, if one tries to cover all of its aspects. Therefore, when discussing conservative Christian's eschatological thinking in America, I will avoid entering into debates about premillennialism, dispensationalism, postmillennialism and amillennialism.²⁴ While the questions surrounding these eschatological positions are interesting and even pertinent to the American socio-religious context, they are not essential for my purposes.

Saint Augustine and the Future City of God

As I suggested, it is appropriate that a chapter on politics and Christian eschatology starts with a discussion of Saint Augustine's views on the issue. The reason for this preamble is two-fold. First, Augustine is one of the most original and relevant systematic thinkers in Western Christianity concerning the relationship between politics and religion (Wolin 2004; Arendt 1977; Neibuhr 1953). Indeed, some perceive

²⁴ Grenz (1992) points out that "postmillennialists view the millennium as a long era of universal peace and righteousness" on earth; premillennialists believe that the Second Coming of Christ "occurs prior to the thousand-year golden age" also to be implemented in this planet. Dispensationalists "share with all premillennialists the central belief that Christ's Second Coming... will occur *before* the future golden age on earth." Finally, "simply stated, amillennialism is an eschatological orientation that awaits no future earthly millennium" (70, 94, 128, 150). For detailed discussions of these views and their respective definitions, see also Clouse (1997); Erickson (1998).

Augustine (1972 [1467]) as one of the first political theorists in this tradition, and his book *City of God* a significant milestone for political theory in general, and Christian political theology in particular (O'Donovan 1987). Thus it should not come as a surprise that, in considering the impact of Augustine's political thought and work, we make the Bishop of Hippo's *City of God* our starting point. This book bears considerable relevance for Christian political thought. The proof of such significance is evidenced in its use by several authors as they engage the world of contemporary politics (Schall 1984; Burt 1963; TeSelle 1988; Neibuhr 1953; Elshtain 1995).

The second rationale, however, is the one that makes Augustine's views, in the context of Western Christianity, a required preliminary consideration in the attempt to understand how eschatological beliefs and politics interact. At this juncture, it is helpful to remember that it is not only Augustine's political thinking that has significantly shaped the Western Christian tradition; his eschatology has also had a considerable impact (Daley 1991; Volf 2000).²⁵ Daley (1991) argues that "without a doubt the theologian who has most influenced the development of Latin eschatology... was Augustine of Hippo..." (31). But even more notable, for our purposes, is the suggestion that there are a substantial number of eschatological assumptions in the *City of God*.²⁶ Concerning this observation, Markus (1970), Volf (2000) and O'Donovan (1987) have

²⁵ The influence of Augustine is still felt in contemporary eschatological debates. Both postmillennialists and amillennialists trace the origins of their positions to the Bishop of Hippo.

²⁶ As Elshtain (1995) reminds us, Augustine's political views are not limited to his exposition in *City of God*. Yet, this book will be the main source of our discussion for it is the expression of Augustine's mature political thought (Burnell 1992). Moreover, it is in this book that Augustine set out to describe the two loves that "makes two polities, love of self (in its political form), the earthly polity...love of God, the heavenly" (Augustine 1972 [1467] XIV, 28). The distinction between these two cities is ultimately an eschatological one (Jenson 2004, 413).

stated that the eschatological aspect of *City of God* is the lens through which Augustine looked at not only his book's own arguments, but also how he contemplates the development of history, society, and politics in general. Augustine's preoccupation in setting his views within an eschatological perspective is particularly evident when one considers the last part of his tome.

Note, for instance, Augustine's discussion at the end of Book XIX and in Book XX, where he describes the ultimate eschatological event in human history which, according to the Christian tradition, takes place in the last judgment. For Augustine, this closing episode in humankind's earthly existence marks the transition from an unjust and violent world into what he considers to be the place of ultimate peace, including social peace, the *civitas Dei*. I will have more to say on Augustine's notion of a *civitas Dei* later. Here it is worth mentioning that, concerning his interpretation of the final judgment, Augustine (1972 [1467]) believes that, in human history's last event, all things will be set right and every individual will receive her deserved rewards, "... the good to the supreme good, the evil to the supreme evil" (XIX, 28). Such perspective is not tangential to Augustine's political and religious thoughts, it is, in fact, central to his views on history and social relationships (Volf 2000). According to Augustine, when one loses sight of this final process of retributive justice, life at all levels becomes almost incomprehensible, because, in the present, it is not uncommon for evil acts to go unpunished and good deeds unrewarded. It is only in light of the justice that will be

established in this concluding event that history, itself, will make sense, and full social reconciliation will be attained (Augustine 1972 [1467] XX, 2).²⁷

Of course, Augustine's eschatology is not limited to his views on the last judgment. A brief survey of Books XX through XXII also reveals that he engages with other end-times themes that have been at the center of much controversy, among Christians, for centuries. Augustine, for instance, spends a considerable amount of time on arguments concerning the millennium, resurrection, hell, and heaven. But the Bishop's intention in pursuing end-times issues, in the final pages of his *magnum opus*, is more than merely doctrinal. The last books of *City of God* are meant to be the climax to his entire work. Such a scheme makes his eschatological arguments more than a pious religious digression from more central themes of a social and political nature. Instead, his eschatological assessments are a means to put all the discussions that precede those closing chapters into perspective (Versfeld 1958).

By addressing, for example, the controversies surrounding the millennium, and condemning a literal interpretation of the term, Augustine rejects an idea that he already argued against in previous books, that is, the view that an ultimate social arrangement, or a golden age, is possible in this historical time (Chesnut 1975). The suggestion of an earthly millennium found in the book of Revelation contemplates, for some, a time of

²⁷ Note, for example, how Volf (2000) sees the importance and applicability of Augustine's eschatological views on the final judgment for matters of social, political and historical reconciliation. Volf (2000) points out that, in Augustine, "the last judgment concerns primarily matters of justice" which is central to communal peace, harmony and reconciliation (92). Johannesen (1984) also makes a similar point when he argues that the "last judgment is essential to moral community, and to civil society, because it is the model of all moral judgment in earthly communities: that is, it holds men to account for their actions in the light of accumulated moral experience of communities in time... But the last judgment implies in its nature that all judgments in the *aevum* of moral communities of living men are provisional judgments. Because all such judgments occur in the circumstance of uncompleted communities" (213).

utter social and political harmony in the present existence. For Augustine, however, the biblical idea of a thousand years of peace and prosperity is simply an allegory about the future *civitas Dei*. A literal millenarian golden age, according to Augustine, was simply an impossibility, a materialistic and indulgent view that should be rejected.²⁸ Moreover, as explained below, his rejection of a literal millennium affirms his view that Christian hope cannot be realized in this existence, because, such a hope is too large to be contained in the present historical time.

But Augustine's denial of an earthly golden age is also related to his conviction that civil governments, including those established on Christian ideals, are incapable of achieving significant social progress, much less anything resembling a biblical millennium. While the Bishop recognizes the importance of secular governments for order and social peace, these commonwealths are, at best, temporal arrangements through which only *some* social good is accomplished. The Bishop's assumptions about the limitations of civil government spring from his earnest belief that, in the *civitas terrena*, those in power do not give the prominence and love that are due to God. On the contrary, in the city of man, God will always be treated with contempt, since humankind's real object of love is the *self* (Augustine 1972 [1467] XIV, 28). This self-centeredness, according to Augustine, is the offspring of a human will that is corrupted, unstable and not inclined to pursue justice and equality. The only true hope for a just and equitable society is the eschatological one represented by the *civitas Dei* (O'Donovan 1987). For this reason, Augustine encourages believers to live in hope and

²⁸ Cf. Augustine 1972 [1467] XX, 7.

expectation of what is still to come, since all the greatest social and political achievements in this life are superficial, ephemeral and relative (Augustine 1972 [1467] IV, 3). Complete peace and happiness can only be accomplished in the *eschaton*, "... for only in eternal life can happiness, the true end of all action, be secure" (O'Donovan 1987, 92).

Based on this eschatological expectation, Markus (1970) argues that Augustine's approach, concerning the limitations of politics, is not simply a matter of realistic or even pessimistic opinions about human nature, which they are, but the conviction that what is to come will be much larger and better than any proposed earthly utopia, because "...the Christian hope was too radical" to be encompassed by the present historical reality (166). Yet, in Augustine's view, such eschatological hope is not an ethereal and futile expectation without any application for the way human beings pursue their lives and political goals. The hope for the future *civitas Dei*, for instance, constitute a transcendental paradigm that sets the standard by which all present social and political systems are to be evaluated, judged, criticized, and, when possible, improved. In this sense, the eschatological city of God, for Augustine, becomes the measure of all other cities. As Markus points out,

[w]orldly values cannot, for [Augustine], be simply endorsed and ratified, nor rejected; they must be given a more complex assessment in eschatological terms. The characteristic Christian assessment of all human values is structured in an eschatological perspective. This is what defines the peculiarity of Augustine's 'pilgrim city' in this world: its members, unlike those of the earthly city, who are fully at home in their temporal concerns, refer these concerns to the enjoyment of 'eternal peace' ... ([emphasis added] Markus 1970, 168)

Hence, Augustine's eschatology has a foundationally analytical and even antagonistic component, with regards to social and political structures functioning within ordinary history. Indeed, his hope for the future sets the tone for a competitive and critical analysis of any society that falls short of the ideal one, i.e., the future *civitas Dei* (Augustine 1972 [1467] I, 1). This claim can be illustrated by comparing Augustine's assessment of the Christian Roman Empire with the triumphant position put forth by Eusebius of Caesarea. Unlike Augustine's, Eusebius' eschatology was utopian in nature, and it also evoked a considerably more hopeful view of history. This optimism was expressed in his belief that socio-political history had achieved a climax in the late Roman Empire (Speck 1996). As Eusebius suggests,

...by the express appointment of the same God, two roots of blessing, the Roman empire and the doctrine of Christian piety, sprang up together for the benefit of men... [With Constantine] a new and fresh era of existence had begun to appear, and a light heretofore unknown suddenly dawned from the midst of darkness of the human race: and all must confess that these things were entirely the work of God, who raised up this pious emperor to withstand the multitude of the ungodly. (quoted in Wolin 2004, 109)

For Eusebius, the "new and fresh era" embodied in the city of Rome, and its Emperor, was the culmination of some significant biblical eschatological hopes, which facilitated the promotion of his theology of history to status of the empire's official ideology (Chesnut 1975, 70). Of course, Augustine would have none of that. His assessment of the Roman Empire is a realistic one, and he perceived it as he did other political structures, that is, commonwealths which are limited in their capacity to accomplish perennial happiness and peace. Yet his focus was not on the obvious limitations of those systems. His was a hopeful vision of the perfect political community

which would definitely exist, albeit in the future, outside history. As Augustine's (1972 [1467]) eschatology demands, he asserts that "[i]ncomparably more glorious than Rome, is that heavenly city in which for victory you have truth; for dignity, holiness; for peace, felicity; for life, eternity" (II, 29). For the Bishop of Hippo, the complete satisfaction of human social and political needs awaited for an eschatological fulfillment, beyond any possible implementation in this life. In sum, Augustine insisted that only the future *civitas Dei* is capable to incorporate all the aspirations of the human life and soul. Hence, the anticipation for this future city frees Augustine from any idealistic expectations concerning historical schemes, and becomes the archetype through which all temporal socio-political systems and ideologies are criticized and evaluated.

The Puritans and the Kingdom of God in the New World

As it has been argued, Augustine's eschatological views were very influential in many corners of the Western church and, by extension, Western civilization (Daley, 1991). The bishop's end-times outlook, however, was far from being the only one in the scope of Christian eschatological traditions. Several Christian authors, before and after Augustine, have given a considerable eschatological emphasis to their political writings (Markus, 1970 ; Wolin 2004; Chesnut 1975). Norman Cohn (2004) has shown, for instance, in his controversial *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, that in Western Europe, between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries, there were several movements that

advanced some sort of eschatological vision for the faithful and the world.²⁹ Many of these movements were revolutionary in nature and presented a radical ideology concerning a hope for the future. Yet the prevailing view of history and the possibilities of human society, at least in Western Christianity, were based on Augustine's eschatology and his understanding that any attempt to implement the *civitas Dei* in history constituted a nonsensical expectation.³⁰ However, with the advent of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, the predominance of Augustine's eschatological insights would be challenged (Geisler 1985). The Reformation, which "set in motion a new study of the Scriptures," would change substantially some of the eschatological teachings of the Western Church, at least in those parts where this movement was influential (Tuveson 1968, 26).

One of the new emphases concerning the Christian Scriptures, introduced by the Protestant reformers, was related to the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments. In their approach, the Protestants highlighted the relevance, in fact the necessity, of biblical prophetic sayings to the church in every age. The outcome of this hermeneutical focus suggested that the experiences of the Jewish people, as the people of God, had contemporary importance to the Christian Church in Europe. After all, Christians were now, themselves, the people of God and all the prophetic warnings which were found in the Old as well as in the New Testaments made demands on European Christians. Of

²⁹ According to Cohn (2004), millenarian movements are not a thing of the past. He notes that many modern social and political movements still present the same radicalism of medieval millenarian agitations. Yet, in a secular society "[t]he old religious idiom has been replaced by a secular one, and this tends to obscure what otherwise would be obvious. For it is the simple truth that, stripped from their original supernatural sanction, revolutionary millenarianism and mystical anarchism are with us still" (286).

³⁰ See Tuveson (1968, 1).

course, if that were the case concerning biblical admonitions, the same would be true about their promises and blessings as well. This new focus on the contemporariness of Scriptural prophecies would definitely put into question Augustine's views on eschatology and the millennium (Tuveson 1968).

Many of those influenced by the Reformation rejected several of the assumptions embedded in Augustine's eschatological views, notably his suggestion that the implementation of a millennium in this present historical time was unfeasible. Some Protestants believed that the Bible clearly mentioned an upcoming golden age, as part of God's plan for human history. Therefore, unlike Augustine, these Protestants, encouraged by their newly reached biblical understanding, perceived the realization of a millennium of peace and prosperity, in this life, as a perfectly attainable objective. Among those groups that embraced the idea of an earthly millennium, and vehemently rejected the Augustinian theory of history, were the English Puritans. The possibility of a millenarian age "inhabited by persons in this mortal flesh" was, in the minds of many Puritans, a possible intramundane reality (Tuveson 1968, 28).³¹

The English Puritans' eschatological tendencies and their engagement with Augustine's thoughts can be illustrated, for instance, by John Bale's *Image of Both Churches* (1849). Bale's book was inspired by Augustine's *City of God*, and it was meant as an apologia of the Protestant Reformation in England. Following the central theme in Augustine's book, Bale was determined to show that history was marked by a

³¹ Puritanism was a movement with a strong eschatological emphasis associated to a revolutionary impetus. Some of this group's social and political attitudes, in their attempts of constructing a Holy Commonwealth, are described by Michael Walzer (1965) as displaying an ideological and a political radicalism that "had never before been known in Europe" (4).

struggle between two major groups. For Bale, however, this conflict was not between the city of man and the city of God, as was the case with Augustine, but it was an apocalyptic contest between two churches, the church of Christ and the church of the Antichrist. The former, the Protestant Church, according to Bale (1849), was “the true christian church, which [was] the meek spouse of the Lamb without spot”, but the former, the Catholic Church, “[was] the proud church of hypocrites, the rose-coloured whore, the paramour of antichrist, and the sinful synagogue of Satan” (251).

It is relevant that in Augustine’s *City of God*, the struggle between the two cities could only be resolved beyond historical time, since the full-fledged existence of the *civitas Dei* rested in an undetermined future. For Bale, who was “convinced that he was living at the end of time,”³² the combat between the true church and the church of hypocrites was being engaged in “providential history and [was] played out and resolved within time” (Zakai 1992, 28). Contrary to Augustine, Bale applies apocalyptic prophecies to events that were coming to pass in his own lifetime with the expectation that the resolution of these same events was at hand. Such exegesis outlined a significant development for Christian eschatology in English Protestantism. Bale’s approach illustrated the trend of interpreting the Bible’s prophetic utterances not as allegories, as Augustine suggested, but as literal descriptions of realities that were occurring in this present historical time (Zakai 1992).

But Bale’s intention was more than the expanding of the eschatological horizon of Biblical prophecy. His goal was also to highlight his belief that, in the end-times’

³² Bercovitch (1975, 77).

struggle between the two churches, England as in the eminence of being transformed into a model of faithfulness through the implementation of the Reformed faith. England, for Bale, had a special place in God's dealing with humankind in those apocalyptic times. Purposefully, Bale argued that the Church of England was founded by Joseph of Arimathea, one of Christ's original disciples. According to Bale's interpretation, by the time the Catholic Church sent "a Romyshe monke called Augustyne" to England in 596, "there to sprede the Romyshe faith and relygyon," the true Christian faith, introduced by Joseph of Arimathea, was already in existence for a long time in that country (quoted in Zakai 1992, 276). Bale's own assessment of ecclesiastical history put the Church of England in an apostolic lineage apart from the Catholic Church, which portrayed the English church as a distinct entity from the corrupted, beyond reformation, Roman religion. As Bale denounced the Roman Catholic institution as the false church, and exalted the Church of England, as the true *ecclesia Dei*, he was setting, for practical purposes, both the English ecclesiastic past and the nation itself as mirrors of providential history. Hence, the struggle between the Church of Christ and the Church of the Antichrist, being staged in the England nation, had, in Bale's understanding, apocalyptic dimensions.

Concerning the eschatological expectations of Protestants in England, Bale's views about the English Church were considerably important. John Foxe, who was widely known by English Puritans, was substantially influenced by John Bale (Bercovitch 1975; Zakai 1992). In his *Actes and Monumentes*, Foxe (1841) constructed an ecclesiastical account that became a response to the Catholic charges which regarded

the Reformation as an invention of a later time, by Martin Luther. Foxe (1841) argued that, contrary to Catholic accusations, there was nothing new about the sixteenth-century ecclesiastical Reformation, for “the same form, usage, and institution of this our present reformed church, are not the beginning of any new church of our own, but the renewing of the old ancient church of Christ” (9). Some of Foxe’s ideas, concerning the genesis of the Reformation, were not unique, as Martin Luther and John Calvin had already made similar points. But the importance of Foxe’s views for the Reformation in England was that he closely associated the Protestant movement with English nationalism.³³ Foxe accomplished this objective by expanding on Bale’s ideas concerning the Church of England and developing a scenario in which England, as a nation, had a major role in God’s ultimate plan for humankind, “almost to the point where English history and ecclesiastical history were inseparable” (Zakai 1992, 33). For instance, Foxe pointed out that “God hath so placed us Englishmen here in one commonwealth, also in one Church, as in one ship together, let us not mangle or divide the ship, which being divided perisheth” (quoted in Haller 1963, 250). In Foxe’s mind, Protestantism and English patriotism was divinely mixed and bound together, “for who could deny that Englishmen held a special role in the favor of the Lord and a special responsibility for the fulfillment of his purposes on earth?” (quoted in Haller 1951, 219).

The eschatological relevance of this discussion about Bale’s and Foxe’s thoughts is that these authors, *via* their apology of Church of England, projected the English

³³ Tuveson (1968) explains that in Foxe’s view “although the English preachers honored Luther, Melancthon, and other continental reformers, they insisted that” the English theologian John Wycliffe (1320-1384) “was ‘the morning star of the Reformation’” (141).

country as a chosen nation that would bring about a new historical age for humankind by implementing, in full, the Protestant Reformation (Zakai 1992). Yet, in the eyes of English Puritans, England did not fulfill its destiny as an elected nation and the seat of Christ's faithful church.³⁴ Disappointed and frustrated with the lack of true reformation in the English Church, Puritans perceived that God was about to reject England by bringing judgment upon it. John Winthrop, one of the leaders of the Puritan migration to America, warned that "sinnes giues vs so great cause to looke for some heauvy Scqourge and Judgment to be coming upon [England]" (Winthrop 1931, 91).

As they fled to the New World, Puritans were motivated by a strong eschatological conviction that, as the true church, they were fleeing into the wilderness because of the impending doom that was about to fall upon sinful England and its church (Zakai 1992). This decisive religious rupture among the English people was marked by the profound Puritan hope that "God will provide a shelter and a hiding place" for those who belong to the true church looking for refuge in America (Winthrop 1931, 91). In other words, as God was removing his blessings from England, many Protestant Reformers believed that, as Cushman later on stated,

... here is a way opened for such as have wings to fly into this wilderness; and as by the dispersion of the Jewish church through persecution, the Lord brought in the fullness of the Gentiles,... so who knoweth, whether now by tyranny and affliction, he suffereth to come upon them, he will not by little and little chase them even amongst the heathens, that so a light may rise up in the dark... and the kingdom of Heaven be taken from them which now have it, and given to a people that shall bring forth the fruit of it. (Cushman 1846, 8)

³⁴ Zakai (1992) argues that the process of desacralization of England is related to the Puritan perception of English apostasy. In fact, "...having failed to bring about a more perfect reformation in the Church of England, Puritans increasingly tended to view their relationship with the established church as an apocalyptic struggle between Christ and the Antichrist" (63).

The Puritan exodus “into the wilderness” towards New England was understood, by this religious group, as an event of biblical proportions. Keeping with the Protestant tradition of interpreting prophetic and biblical events in light of their own experiences, the Puritans equated their migration to America with the flight of Old Testament Israel into the Exodus wilderness. This Puritan movement to America was done with the hope of establishing a new sacred place. In the unspoiled American environment, the exercise of pure religion would work, unlike in England, in tandem with society and civil government. Concerning their political ideals, the Puritans were, like John Calvin and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “would-be legislators” who sought to “replace a decaying order” with a new political-ecclesiastical one that would fit their somewhat radical views (Walzer 1965, 203).³⁵ Thus, in this new sacred geography of the New World, a pure Christian faith could flourish, alongside a Puritan political commonwealth, without the impediments imposed by an unfaithful English ecclesiastic leadership and a short-sighted government. Indeed, the flight into the “wilderness,” with all its religious and political expectations and nuances, was an important concept in the Puritan migration to America (Miller and Johnson 1963). It was at this moment, as was with the flight of the Jews into the desert coming from sinful Egypt, that a “prodigal nation”, with a new form of religion and government, is born in New England.³⁶

³⁵ McKenna (2007) also comments that “the brand of Reformed Protestantism the Puritans brought with them from England’s Puritan commonwealth had within it a strain of intense political activism, one rooted in the image of the Puritan community as the collective agent of providence” (4).

³⁶ I am in debt to Andrew Murphy (2009) for this expression. Some may argue that the Puritans are not the original founders of America, but as McKenna (2007) pointed out it is “not out of place to call them the founders of America’s political culture and rhetoric” (4).

According to several commentators, eschatological concerns were central to the entire Puritan enterprise into the New World. These authors notice, for instance, that the Puritan migration to New England was closely associated with the concept of the millennium.³⁷ The importance of such observation cannot be underestimated for, insofar as the Puritan religious life was concerned, they believed that the new church's faithfulness to the principles laid out by the Reformation would bring about the golden age described in the Scriptures. New England, for the Puritans, would be *the city upon a hill*, "...the new Canaan, and on this land would emerge the fabled millennium of peace foretold in the book of Revelation" (Northcott 2004, 14). The new geographical land was destined to become a "sacred" land, the object of Divine favor, which would assist in the fulfillment of God's eschatological promises to humanity (Miller and Johnson 1963, 119-20). Hence, in the formation of America, England was replaced, in the eyes of the Puritans, as a chosen nation, the New Jerusalem on earth (Murphy 2009; Zakai 1992; Tuveson 1968). This new prodigal country, and not England, would project its light upon all the other nations, for "...our Glorious LORD, will have an Holy City in AMERICA; a City, the Street whereof will be Pure Gold...[there fore] Put on thy beautiful Garments, O America, the Holy City" (Mather 1710, 1, 43, 46). As Urian Oakes also suggested in his sermon *New England Pleaded With*,

If we... lay all things together, this our Commonwealth seems to exhibit to us a specimen, of a little model of the Kingdome of Christ upon Earth...wherein it is generally acknowledge and expected. This work of God set on foot and advanced to a good Degree here, being spread over the face of the Earth, and

³⁷ See for instance Zakai (1992); McKenna (2007); Bercovitch (1978; 1993). "The Puritans came with the belief that the millennium, or the time in which Christ would reign on earth with his saints, as described in the Book of Revelation, was at hand" (Zakai 1992, 231).

perfected as to a greater Degree of Light and Grace and Gospel-glory will be (as I conceive) the Kingdome of Jesus Christ so much spoken of. (Oakes 1673, 40)

In their assessment, regarding the possible implementation of “a little model of the Kingdome of Christ” in New England, Puritans blurred the line that separated Augustine’s two cities (Bercovitch 1975, 33). Such eschatological and ideological expectations of a *city of God* in New England later came to characterize not only American Protestantism but American republicanism as well (Noll 2002).³⁸ The Puritan eschatological attitude concerning America’s exceptionalism as an elected nation - the seat of the “Holy City” – was so prevalent that it became part of this country’s understanding of itself, its mission and its notion of patriotism.³⁹

For all this glorious suggestion that, as a nation, America was the “New Jerusalem... erected in so dark a corner of the world,” one aspect of God’s election that cannot be overlooked is that, such a special status, came with a price (Mather 1685, 77-8). To fulfill its eschatological expectations, as a country that would perform a special role in the divine plan for the millennium at the end of times, America would have to follow the path set forth by God and not astray from it. Simply stated, to accomplish its eschatological *telos* as a people, Americans would have to show virtues that would enable them to fulfill their special call since “with chosenness came responsibility” (Murphy 2009, 65). However, as the early Puritans were quick to observe, the job of

³⁸ Moreover, as Johannesen (1984) argues, “[m]illennialism in America became the ground in which reformed Christianity fused with classical republicanism in a single ecstatic vision of redeemed nationhood and universal peace and brotherhood” (207).

³⁹ Bercovitch (1975) puts it somewhat bluntly when he suggests that “[t]he legacy of the Puritan conflation of the sacred and the secular may be stated, retrospectively, in the boldest terms: only in America did nationalism come to carry with it the Christian meaning of the sacred. Only ‘America’, of all national designations, took on the combined force of eschatology and chauvinism” (86). Cf. also McKenna (2007).

keeping the new nation on a virtuous path would be a challenging one. As early as the mid-1600s, New England was entering a crisis of orthodoxy, which is clearly expressed in Samuel Torrey's *Exhortation unto Reformation*,

Reformation hath been the design of New England, and therefore Reformation it is the profession of New England. This work of reform, it hath been (especially by this generation) (not only) much neglected, but even (almost) utterly deserted... (Torrey 1674, 7)

As the country became in danger of losing its vision as the New Jerusalem, Americans needed to be reminded that, as was with England, a forgetful attitude about their covenant with God could have dire consequences for the country's mission.⁴⁰ God, after all, "requires fidelity" from his people (Murphy 2009, 35). One of the resources used by the Puritans to remind Americans of their special call as a chosen nation was the jeremiad.⁴¹ Much has already been said about jeremiads and their role in American political culture; therefore it is not my intention to repeat these arguments in their fullness here.⁴² Suffice to say that jeremiads are religious or political utterances that "identify problems that show a decline vis-à-vis the past"; "identify turning points"; and "call for reform, repentance and renew" (Murphy 2009, 6-9). The relevance of this type of religious-political discourse for this chapter's purpose is *not*, however, related to what jeremiads have to say about the past (as it is the emphasis of several discussions on the subject); but, as I will argue below, what they imply regarding the future.

⁴⁰ The Puritans believed that "If the people of this 'Chosen Nation' have strayed from the path of rightly ordered politics and society, the consequences are not merely social and political but world-historical, even transcendent in nature" (Murphy 2009, 10).

⁴¹ Jeremiad is a "term that recalls the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, who wept over the sins of ancient Israel" (Hughes 2003, 97).

⁴² For extensive discussions on American jeremiads see Murphy 2009; Bercovitch 1978; Lienesch 1993; Dickson 1987.

Granted, at first, the basic function of the exhortations embodied in the jeremiads is to compel the people to look back at the covenant God made with the founders (Berchovitch 1975; Murray 2009). For that reason, a jeremiad becomes a means to identify a decline in standards, and call the people's attention to a godly period in the past, from which they can learn and emulate. Thus, in a way, the objective of these exhortations is to help the listener to remember "the former dayes and consider whether *it was then better with us, than it is now*" (Danforth 1997, 467). In this sense, through their jeremiads, New England's Puritan prophets attempted to reform society by criticizing the present status quo in light of the past since "...in the praise of the past we are to read a critique of the present" (Murphy 2009, 20).⁴³ The point of a jeremiad, then, was to stress that, in light of the virtuous demeanor of the first settlers, the moral conduct of subsequent generations of New Englanders left much to be desired. For the Puritans, then, the jeremiad's underlining assumption was that a pious and godly order had existed, and such a past example should have been used as a canon for the new generation.

That said, in American religious tradition, exhortations for the restoration of past moral standards is constantly related to eschatological vision of the country's millennial expectation (Watson 1997). As Murphy (2009) explains, American jeremiads are saturated with the pervasive Puritan concept of the country's exceptionalism, and by "a widespread interest in millennialism, the notion that Christ will return for a thousand year-reign on Earth, and that America (later, the United States) had a special role to play

⁴³ See also McKenna (2007, 14).

in God's plan for the end-time" (10).⁴⁴ Therefore, despite its call to consider the past, jeremiads are also used with a considerable eschatological emphasis. So, while these exhortations, for instance, prompted New Englanders to look back in hope of restoring an ideal past, these same admonitions carried in their core an even stronger message about the glorious destiny that awaited the new nation, if it mended its ways. Jeremiads, in other words, present an eschatological element as they bring to memory not only history but also the hopes and expectations of the original American experiment which, by God's blessings, would lead the world to the "dawn of that glorious day" of the millennium (Edwards 1972, 270).⁴⁵ In this manner, a jeremiad is more than a discussion and reflection about the past, but the socio-religious "ritual of a culture" which is in constant motion, sustained by a "faith in process" that discarded "the Old World ideal of stasis for a New World vision of the future" (Bercovitch 1978, 23).

This concern with the country's bright possibilities for the future can be noted in a brief consideration of Jonathan Edwards's views during the revivals that occurred in New England, in the early eighteenth-century. Edwards' observations about the state of religion in the nation, and his hopes during the revival, are instructive because he was substantially in line with his Puritan predecessors concerning God's covenant with America (Stout 1988). Like other Puritans, Edwards was usually vehement in his condemnations of New England's sins and its forgetfulness of the founders' faith. In his

⁴⁴ While jeremiads do not necessarily have to be associated with a religious group, even progressives and liberals have made use of these resources throughout American history, it has been, for Christians in America, a means to express their frustrations concerning a country that, as they perceive, is becoming increasingly forgetful of its special character as God's chosen nation (Murphy 2009).

⁴⁵ What is implied in this expression is that "the millennium itself would center in America" (McKenna 2007, 67).

correspondence with Scottish divines, Edwards portrayed the decadent situation of the country, in his own time, in a series of rhetorical questions, such as “how lamentable is the moral and religious state of these American colonies?... How much is that kind of religion, that was professed and much experienced and practiced, in the first, and apparently the best times of New England, grown and growing out of credit?” (Edwards 1977, 337-38). Despite his frustrations with the colonies’ moral and spiritual conditions, which are implied in these utterances, Edwards kept gazing into the future. He was convinced that God was not done with his chosen nation, as it became eventually evident, for him, in the observable signs of divine work through the religious revivals of his time. With those events in mind, Edwards argued that the kingdom of God, the “historical millennium” on earth, was about to occur, for “‘tis not unlikely that this work of God’s Spirit, that is so extraordinary and wonderful, is the dawning, or at least a prelude, of that glorious work of God, so often spoke in Scripture...” (Edwards 1972, 353).⁴⁶ What is remarkable in Edwards’s overall reasoning about these revivals was his belief that the expected millenarian golden age would “begin in America.” (Edwards 1972, 353).⁴⁷

Of course, Edwards’ belief about America becoming the precursor of the millennium was not a new doctrine among Protestants in New England. Edwards, however, may have been the Puritan who best systematized this belief about the nation’s

⁴⁶ Cf. Goen (1959).

⁴⁷ Edwards eventually recanted of this suggestion but, according to Bryant (1983) “[t]hese words were to have fateful consequences for Edwards’ contemporaries as well as for subsequent generations. Here Edwards, surely one of America’s most distinguished theologians and finest intellects, voiced a conviction that has continue to haunt American religious and political life: America is called to a special destiny in the unfolding of divine providence” (49).

destiny in light of what was happening in America at the time.⁴⁸ Like the Puritan Jeremiahs before him, Edwards, while lamenting over the abandonment of the golden days of the past, never lost sight of the future promised age when America would play a definite role in humankind's destiny. But, again, if the country were to achieve its providential fate it needed to heed God's admonition and mend its ways.⁴⁹ Only through obedience to God, and by preserving its unique identity and ethical standing before the eyes of the world, would the country inevitably be blessed and enabled to complete its future and ultimate purpose as *a city upon a hill*.

Note that, despite their hermeneutical differences, the Puritans, like Augustine, criticized and judged the present situation of their societies by clinging to a possible imagined eschatological future. If for Augustine the eschatological hope was represented by the just and equitable *civitas Dei*, for the Puritans the hope of an ideal society resided in the young nation of America. Of course, for Augustine the new and ideal order was *not yet* among us because it resides in a future outside the boundaries of this world. Nevertheless, this eschatological reality projects its light in the present, and it functions as a means to evaluate the *city of man*. In contrast, for Puritans, the hope for a better social and political order was *already* manifested in the new born country of the United States. The full realization of the country as a millennial nation, of course, was still to come. But, similar to Augustine, the Puritan expectation for the future became a means to criticize the present. Simply stated, through their jeremiads, the Puritans

⁴⁸ See also McKenna (2007).

⁴⁹ The Puritan jeremiad often reminded people that their election was somewhat conditional upon their obedience to God.

evaluated the present faith and moral laxity of the nation by their contemplation of America's future. The Puritans "... fixed their gaze on the future" and, while the past played an important role for them, they kept the country's eschatological role, in the millennium, as their ultimate evaluative paradigm (Bercovitch 1975, 25).

Conservative Christians and the Future of the Chosen Nation

From the Puritans' point of view, the belief that the country had a millennial role required that its social, political and moral conditions be kept under constant scrutiny. In their jeremiads, the Puritans criticized their own society when they perceived that it was straying from the right path of pursuing its future glorious destiny. By doing so, the Puritans built into their eschatological views a systematic political reasoning that not only highlighted the new nation's providential election, but also its future responsibilities, in light of such vocation. After all, since its inception, the nation is not "...an ultimate end in itself but stands under transcendent judgment and has value only insofar as it realizes" its call as a special community (Bellah 1975, 254). The question that faces us at this point in the argument is whether the Puritan eschatological discourses with its socio-political overtones are still part of the American religious tradition. More to the point, is it reasonable to assume that jeremiads in the molds of the Puritans - with their blending of socio-political and eschatological perspectives tied to the country's origins and its destiny - remain a component of American life? Should modern eschatological discourses by conservative Christians, for instance, be read as

implying socio-political assumptions, or should these views be simply understood as expressions of theological and religious beliefs?

Timothy P. Weber (1987), in his important study about end-times beliefs in America history, is of the opinion that parenthetical commentaries on the nation's social and political conditions, which at times appear in contemporary conservative Christians' eschatological works, are not to be taken out of their religious contexts. Weber suggests that while there are clear political elements in many end-times proclamations, the primary goal of these exhortations are spiritual. The eschatological statements of many Christian conservatives in America, according to this view, are mainly private and religious in nature, "...although it has had some social and political consequences..." (Weber 1987, 229). Weber's assessment seems to be correct, at least to a certain extent. It is difficult to argue against the centrality of religious convictions and personal faith found in many of the eschatological writings by authors such as Timothy LaHaye, Hal Lindsey, Pat Robertson, and Jerry Falwell among others.⁵⁰ LaHaye, for instance, who is a conservative Baptist minister, has co-authored one of the most successful series of eschatological books in the country's history, the *Left Behind* novels, and has strong religious convictions. These convictions are supported by his view of the Bible as the word of God, which he interprets in a literal manner in order to grasp its correct meaning (LaHaye and Jenkins 1999). In his eschatological writings, LaHaye ultimately believes that his presentation of the future is an expression of his personal faith and conviction of what the Bible clearly teaches concerning the end-times (LaHaye and Jenkins 1999).

⁵⁰ CF. Lahaye (1978); Lindsey (1981); Robertson (1991); Falwell (1979).

Yet, to simply approach contemporary conservative Christians' eschatological assessments as nothing more than religious rhetoric, as Weber suggests, is to disregard this group's considerable interest and involvement in international and domestic affairs (Boyer 1992). Granted, there seems to be an attempt by conservative Christians to stress a distinction between what they believe, as a matter of personal conviction on social-political issues, and what they understand to be biblical prophetic sayings about the end-times. Nevertheless, it is highly questionable whether conservatives Christians have been successful in keeping their prophetic utterances and political views apart because "...in their eschatology as in all their thinking [they] take strong political stances" (Lienesch 1993, 244). Furthermore, as Frykholm (2004) comments, about LaHaye's *Left Behind*, the books are imbued with subliminal, and at times clear, social and political messages that "speak both to the grand scale politics and to the small scale of everyday, interpersonal interaction" (168). Therefore, in certain instances, it may be reasonable to assume that, despite their best efforts, it is quite difficult to separate conservative Christians' heartfelt beliefs about the end-times from their social and political agendas.

A case in point in this amalgamation of eschatological thinking and politics is LaHaye's (1978) *The Unhappy Gays*, which is primarily a book about the recent "homosexual epidemic" in the United States. In this volume, the author noticeably makes moral-political commentaries within a broader eschatological context when he asserts that

it does not take a prophet or the son of a prophet to foresee what lies ahead for this country and the rest of the world. Most Bible prophecy scholars teach that

we are... in ‘the last days’... Interestingly enough, homosexuality is to be a part of the buildup of the ‘perilously evil times’ that are prophesied for the last days.” (LaHaye 1978, 203)

The intriguing aspect of LaHaye’s pessimistic eschatological vision is his disapproving note about a specific sexual orientation, through the suggestion that the prominence of homosexuality in American society is in itself a sign of the “perilous evil times” prophesied for the end. LaHaye’s remarks, here, are more than eschatological statements; they are also socio-political commentaries on American’s moral condition through its acceptance of homosexual lifestyles. He makes this point even more evident when he concludes that

[a]t the instigation of the pro-homosexual media, public schools, politicians in high places, and gay militants, the tidal wave of homosexuality, threatens the very existence of a moral America... somehow the prophecies of ‘perilous times’ for the last days have immobilized the Christian community at a crucial time in history when we are the last hope for a sexually sane and moral America. (LaHaye 1978, 204)

Granted, the basis for LaHaye’s eschatological comments on homosexuality, according to the author, comes from the Bible, as can be observed by his use of numerous biblical references (LaHaye 1978). Nevertheless, it is difficult to overlook that the above prophetic observation is not only loaded with a moral commentary, but it is also made by an individual who has been actively involved in political and social movements which have as their primary mission the defense of American traditional values. LaHaye, for instance, is the founder of organizations such as Coalition for Traditional Values, and Family Life Seminars. He also served in the board of Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority, a movement with an aggressive political agenda, which lobbied for a more robust American military, and family values, while opposing

abortion. Of course, there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of LaHaye's religious beliefs, as he analyses the *eschaton* and its effects on America and the world. But could it be assumed that LaHaye's eschatology is influenced, at least in part, by his political views and vice-versa? Flesher (2006) suggests that it is not unreasonable to presume that LaHaye may have used an eschatological agenda "to declare what is good and what is evil, who is in and who is out, and how proper [people] ought to behave" (55-6). Therefore, LaHaye's eschatological utterances can be approached as the end-times perspective of a "seasoned political and cultural activist" who is an important force in the world of conservative, fundamentalist politics (Shuck 2005, 54).

LaHaye's is not an isolated case when it comes to censuring the country through eschatological plots. Other individuals have also been engaged in mixing end-times concerns with contemporary social and political estimations of American life. Like LaHaye, some of these individuals have not only a considerable interest in eschatology but have also been actively involved in politics. The Reverend Pat Robertson (2004; 1995), for instance, who ran for the presidency in the 1980s, is the author of several books that deal with the country's political establishment, such as *Courting Disaster: How the Supreme Court is Usurping the Power of Congress and the People*, and eschatological themes as in his novel *The End of Age*. While Robertson's (1991) books generally focus either on politics or eschatology, in *The New World Order*, the author creates a scenario that combines political, economic and religious elements in order to describe a worldwide end-times conspiracy, which attempts to implement a one-world-government. In this book, which was *not* intended as fiction, Robertson affirms that he

will show "...the origin, meaning, and ultimate destiny of the new world order within the clear purview of Biblical prophecy..." The ultimate purpose of such endeavor is to help people understand "...what God has to say about one-world government..." (Robertson 1991, 14). Indeed, the book's overall argument is that God does not approve of this type of political arrangement, and that the ultimate catastrophic consequence of creating such a global system, is the international acclamation of the Antichrist, as the head of the world governing body.

While Robertson shows, in *The New World Order*, a substantial preoccupation with the rearranging of the world's political systems into one-government, this is not his only concern. The author is also alarmed with the political and moral decline of America and how such deterioration facilitates the introduction of this type of world-government. Robertson puts much of the blame for America's moral decay, which compromises the country's beneficial influence in the world, on liberal politicians and intellectuals who, as he claims, are bringing the nation down through the progressive dismantling of its unique heritage, in the last forty years (Robertson 1991, 168). Robertson, for such reason, severely criticizes those who are, through their liberal outlook, destroying the American court system; rejecting the country's traditional values in colleges and universities; embracing the New Age movement among other social, religious and political evils. Yet, the gravest of all liberals' mistakes, according to Robertson, is the undermining of the nation's original religious and political ideals for, in doing so, these individuals are foolishly clearing the path for the rise of Antichrist (Robertson 1991, 255).

As LaHaye's and Robertson's assessments show, the synthesis of eschatological beliefs and social-political views is not unusual in contemporary America. On the contrary, it is an intrinsic part of modern-day conservative Christians' reading of the world's situation and America's condition, in particular. Moreover, such an approach is not fortuitous. As some commentators have suggested, the objective of eschatological narratives like the one developed by LaHaye and Robertson is to help believers in their attempt to understand the ever changing dynamics of their own societies which are, according to these eschatological visions, plagued with evil and corruption (O'Leary 1994; Frykholm 2004; Harding 1994; Shuck 2005). By grasping the eschatological meaning behind those events, believers can have hope that these occurrences are under God's control which, in turn, give them a "... firm foundation upon which to base their lives" (Shuck 2005, 55). Eschatology then functions – at least for some conservative Christian groups in America - as a means of shaping reality by putting forth political, moral and religious pronouncements about the world and the nation. Underlining this effort is a sincere struggle to make sense of otherwise unintelligible facts. But, as the intertwining of eschatology with the country's political and moral assessments become evident, the next significant question is, as Harding (1994) suggests, "What is the politics of these apocalyptic readings?" (60).

In the process of answering her own inquiry, Harding (1994) raises another question that points to one central issue in many conservatives' political eschatology: "What about America?" (68). The reply to this second query underscores the assumption that much of the politics that comes through the conservative Christians'

eschatological proclamations betrays a strong patriotic sentiment about the country's future. Conservative Christian leaders' eschatological views, especially those involved in political activism, reveal a discernable interest in maintaining America's prominence in the world even as the planet and history come to an apocalyptic conclusion (Harding 1994; Clouse 1983; 1997; 2008). America's future is of a central concern in eschatological prophecies by conservative Christian writers because, as they see it, the nation continues to be "the hope for the world, and Jesus Christ the hope of America." Yet, if the country is to remain "the hope for the world," it needs to "...return to the Bible principles that provided [the] nation's greatness..." (LaHaye 1976, 84).

Such "patriotic eschatologism"⁵¹ points to two important concepts that refer us back to the Puritan attitude concerning American exceptionalism in the end-times. First, as was the case with the Puritans, many conservative Christians in America today still perceive the country as a chosen nation with a special role to play in the future of humankind. This point becomes quite apparent, for instance, in Robertson's (1991) outburst of eschatological patriotism when he proclaims that the one-world-government "...can come together only after the Christian United States is out of the way...a vital, economically strong, Christian United States would have at its disposal the spiritual and material force to prohibit a world wide satanic dictator from winning his battle" (256). In this statement, the Puritan patriotic zeal, which claimed for America an exceptional role in the world's *eschaton*, still comes across quite strongly. In fact, Hunter argues that the end-times hope for America, expressed in Robertson's (1991) assessment, has

⁵¹ I use this expression to sum up and characterize conservative Christians' eschatological sentiments and concerns about America's future.

continued to be sustained even by those not directly connected to the Puritans, but apparently influenced by their views, such as Catholics and Jews, "... who also believed that America was a land of real spiritual promise" (61).

Second, for the Puritans, America could only fulfill its eschatological destiny if it stayed true to its original principles as a moral and religious nation. This idea is also very strong among conservative Christians, as it comes through in their eschatological rhetoric. Note, for instance, that LaHaye shows considerable anxiety with the impact of the country's decadent moral and spiritual condition on its ultimate fate when he argues that "[t]he future of America is up for grabs... It could go either way – to the left and let an elitist minority of secularists continue to lead this nation" to destruction, or the nation can be saved and maintain an important role in the final days if it moves, with the help of Christian political activism, "...to the right... to the control of those who continue the spirit of our Founding Fathers..." (Lahaye 1978, 200-1).

Therefore, the conservative Christians' political and moral commentaries, found in their eschatological pronouncements, constitute not only a form of "patriotic eschatologism" but, similarly to the Puritans, these exhortations are a form of jeremiad as well. In LaHaye's and Robertson's eschatological assessments, for example, as in the Puritan's jeremiads, there are the *identification of problems*, such as the waning of America's economic and political power; and the *identification of turning points*, like the forfeiting of American's traditional values. These discourses, which can be characterized as "eschatological jeremiads," also include a *call for reform*. These calls for change are usually within the context of describing the "evils" that are destroying the

nation, which Americans are encouraged to address, so the country can maintain its course towards the goal of becoming *a city upon the hill*.

In the abovementioned examples of eschatological discourses, liberal ideas and homosexuality appear as serious “evils” that jeopardize the future of the “Christian United States.” These “evils” are not the only morally reprehensible aspects of American life that are under scrutiny in conservatives’ “eschatological jeremiads.” The other “sins” that are threatening the country include the teaching of evolution, the removal of prayer from public schools, the legalization of abortion and the growth of Eastern and other non-Christian religious groups (Murphy 2009, 111-2). This inventory is far from exhaustive, but it represents the top issues underlining the struggle to define America in light of the pluralism that permeates the country’s social and political landscape. Of course, pluralism in America, especially the religious kind, is nothing new, and Christians have been dealing with it for several decades. Yet, recently, according to some conservative views, pluralism has been undermining the orthodox Christian outlook that has sustained, since the Puritans, a sense of identity, purpose and ideals for many Americans (Rose 1995; Smith 1985; Hutchison 2003). Therefore, pluralism also represents a major evil since, what is at stake here is the “the meaning of America,” and, moreover, “who we have been in the past, who we are now, and perhaps most important, who we, as a nation, will aspire to become in the new millennium” (Hunter 1991, 50).

As a matter of principle, the Jeremiahs of American conservative Christianity are on the side of pluralism.⁵² Falwell, for instance, who was the founder of the now defunct Moral Majority, affirmed that his group strongly supported a pluralistic America. On the other hand, he also made sure that his audience understood that a pluralistic country was, in a sense, a straying from its original path, because “this nation was founded upon Judeo-Christian ethic by men and women who were strongly influenced by biblical moral principles” (Falwell 1981, 145). Overall, Falwell (1979) insisted that the founding fathers “were putting together God’s country, God’s republic, and for that reason God has blessed her for two glorious centuries” (23). Yet, in these last days, according to Falwell, America had forgotten much of its Christian heritage as it embraced diverse moral and religious perspectives that do not mingle well with its status as a chosen nation, as suggested by its complacency towards abortion and the election of Bill Clinton, who the leader of the Moral Majority perceived as “the country’s first New Age president” (quoted in Harding 1994, 73). America, for this reason, has been in an *apocalyptic* battle against the Lamb,⁵³ and the country was deservedly punished on September 11 for, as Falwell described in his jeremiad,

what we saw on [that day], as terrible as it is, could be miniscule if, in fact – if, in fact – God continues to lift the curtain and allow the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve... the ACLU’s got to take a lot of blame for this... the abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked... [along with] the pagans... and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People for the American Way...(quoted in Murphy 2009, 4)

⁵² Cf. Handy (1984, 208) and Lienesch (1993, 254).

⁵³ Cf. Revelation 17:14.

In contemplating these “evils,” Falwell and other modern Jeremiahs have been insistent in their calls for reform, through their attempts to warn the country that the disregard for its original ideals can be catastrophic.⁵⁴ A glorious destiny is the reward for an obedient nation; its destruction is the lamentable consequence of being found false to its vocation. Hence, according to several conservative Christians, America - as was England for the Puritans - is running the risk of being rejected as a chosen people. But, unlike England, America can be saved.⁵⁵ LaHaye (2001), for example, believes that the country can still maintain its essential freedoms and its role as a millennium nation as long as there is a return, of its official public policies, to the Christian consensus of “our Founding Fathers and the Biblical principles of law” that have proved essential to the country’s success and protection in the last two hundred years (169). By presenting their concerns and calling for a return to a Christian consensus, within the framework of their eschatological discussions, conservatives insert in their jeremiads a considerable sense of authority and urgency. Indeed, America is portrayed, in these end-times proclamations, as running out of time and the consequences of failing to act promptly will be considerable, perhaps, irreversible. The end, after all, is near.

⁵⁴ In Hagee’s (2001) prophetic vision, he affirms that because of its descent into immorality “America is a soulless mockery of what it once was. Our society, like ancient Rome’s, is headed for destruction...” (123).

⁵⁵ “We have the opportunity to formulate a new beginning for America...In our attempt to rally a diversity of morally conservative Americans together in Moral Majority, we were convinced that millions of people were fed up with the fruits of liberalism, both in politics and religion” (Falwell 1981, 145). See also Lindsey (1981) on how conservative Christian can rescue America in the last days, and preserve it as a world power, by getting involved in politics.

Conclusion

For many Christians, eschatology is a means to evaluate and criticize the present by contrasting it with an imagined future. As early as Augustine, eschatological beliefs have been a resource for hope in times of social-political decay, but they have also furnished the tools for an evaluation of those same degrading conditions. Augustine did not suppose, as some of his contemporaries did, that a perfect millennial society could come to pass in this historical time; rather he kept his eyes on the undetermined, unhistorical, and extramundane future. The perfect city, Augustine believed, was not an earthly possibility. The happiness and peace that he foresaw for his eschatological *civitas* emboldened him to take a critical stand regarding earthly commonwealths, by noting that the Christian hope was too large to fit into any political dream.

Unlike Augustine, the Puritans had a vision for a possible millennium in the present era and they perceived New England as the New Jerusalem, the forerunner of a golden age on earth. For them, America was a chosen nation that, if it kept its covenant with God, would bring the world into a new age of prosperity and peace. However, the Puritans noted that the country, at times, was not following the right path toward being the precursor of such a period. Hence, through the means of jeremiads, the Puritans not only called the country back to its original divine intentions, but they did so by believing and reminding others that America had an important role to fulfill in the future. In their criticism of the present, the New England Jeremiahs pointed the way back to rightness, while their eyes were fixed on what awaited the country in the *eschaton*.

Like the Puritans, many conservative Christians in America are not afraid of criticizing the country's decadent conditions in light of what they perceive to be the eschatological hope for the chosen nation. America should become an important player in humankind's future events. Yet, as conservative Christian authors make clear in their "eschatological jeremiads," the country is losing its identity by not keeping to its ideals as a millennium nation, and it is running the risk of being greatly punished by its lack of vision. In their elaborate eschatological assessments of the end-times, for which they claim biblical support, conservatives find ways to chastise the country by inserting a great degree of urgency and authority to their views.

CHAPTER IV

POLITICS AND ISLAMIC ESCHATOLOGY

Islam has resurfaced as a dynamic factor in the political life of many Muslim communities in the last decades (Esposito 1983; Haddad and Smith 1994; Haddad and Esposito 2000; Smith 2007; Hasan 2000; Kymlicka 1996). With its membership comprising about one fifth of the world's population and encompassing countries from all continents, the Islamic faith has the potential to socially affect large areas of the globe (Esposito 2010).⁵⁶ Its presence has become particularly noticeable in Europe and North America, where Muslim groups are increasingly influential as economic and political forces.⁵⁷ This awareness of Muslim global presence has led some authors to ponder on how the influx of Islamic people and practices will interact, for instance, with societal norms of democratic Western nations (Esposito and Voll 1996; Sutton and Vertigans 2005).⁵⁸

The resurgence of Islam has also become an important religious and political phenomenon to Westerners because Muslims are associated, maybe unfairly, with some

⁵⁶ By using the term Muslim to identify the followers of Islam, I am not suggesting that this religious group is a monolithic one. One major distinction, between Sunni and Shia, will become evident as this chapter progresses.

⁵⁷ See Esposito (2010, 4).

⁵⁸ This observation is particularly important if we consider that "Islam today is not only a faith that inspires personal piety and provides meaning and guidance for this life and the next. It is also an ideology and worldview that inform Muslim politics and society" (Esposito 2010, 4).

major global occurrences. The attacks on North American territory, on September 11 of 2001, for instance, brought to the forefront the reality that some grievances coming from the Muslim community cannot be simply ignored and dismissed by Western leaders. The reasons for these attacks, however, are hard to pinpoint and may have a complex array of motivations.⁵⁹ Yet, for many, those terrorist events that traumatized the city of New York and the United States, in general, will be always seen as a product of Islamic radicalism personified in the messianic figure of Osama Bin Laden (Furnish 2005).

What followed as consequence to these terrorist attacks, notably the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, is no less significant for the West and its future interactions with Muslim societies. Apparently, the United States and some European countries will be dealing with the implications of these wars for years to come. In this regard, several of the conflicts that have sprung as the end-product of the September 11 attacks, and the Western responses that accompanied them, will shape the future of the nations immediately involved in these clashes and possibly beyond (Nasr 2007). Yet many hope that despite the intense social turmoil in Muslim countries, positive political changes, including the implementation of democracy, can find a fertile soil to grow and expand within those societies (Chomsky 2007). Of course, nobody can predict whether this will be the case. While this chapter does not presume to answer this question in any definite terms, it is nonetheless a contribution to this debate about the political future of Islamic groups by reflecting on one aspect that cannot be overlooked when considering the hopes of these societies, i.e., eschatology. As I argued previously, Muslims are members

⁵⁹ Some of these motivations are certainly due to economic problems in the Middle East but other reasons are less conventionally explained (Cook 2002).

of a community deeply interested in end-times issues and, for several groups in that religious faith, politics ultimately falls within these eschatological concerns (Chittick 1987).

Lately, the socio-political events that are affecting and transforming Islamic societies have spurred an even greater interest on the topic of eschatology and helped to increase the number of writings on the subject, which seem to suggest that end-times concerns are going to become progressively more pertinent to members of the Muslim religion (Cook 2002, 150). Eschatological perspectives, after all, are crucial means to read and analyze daily difficulties, and global occurrences, in light of the hopeful prospect that “beyond the wars, suffering, and injustice of the present lies a future of peace, harmony and happiness” (Boyer 2008, 70). Moreover, as is the case with several faith communities, there is a tendency among Muslims to turn to religion in search of solutions for their political problems, which can make eschatological beliefs even more socially relevant (Roy 2004; Esposito 1983; Boyer 2008). In fact, according to Boyer (2008), we are presently living in an era in which many religious groups, mainly Islamic ones, are adopting a profound politicized eschatology which “has infused politics with a fierce religious intensity” (70).

In chapter two I dealt with some foundational aspects of Islamic eschatology. Suffice to say here that, in Islam, the idea of eschatology plays a substantial role in its belief system and it is closely associated with the Last Day or Day of Judgment (Chittick 1987; Rippin 1996). The message about the Last Day finds its basis in the authoritative Qur’anic scriptures which gives, in Muslim theology, considerable weight to this final

event in human history. Such impending occurrence underscores, first, the inevitable *return (ma'ad)* of the faithful to Allah and, second, a major rupture with the present historical reality. Thus, the Day of Judgment brings with it the suggestion that the historical process will be interrupted so that humankind can return to its Creator and be finally made accountable for its good and evil deeds - at least as Islam perceives them.

Muslims, as their eschatological faith then implies, will be judged according to the actions and duties performed in this life, which indicates that the time and events that precede that final day are of considerable importance to their everyday praxis. For this reason, as the end looms closer and the Last Day becomes more and more evident, religious, social and political behaviors take on an ever increasing importance.⁶⁰ But at this point in the discussion, it is necessary to introduce another aspect of Islamic eschatology that has been purposefully omitted until now. This element must be included here because it is closely related to the Last Day and bears great significance to an adequate understanding of Muslim thinking on political eschatology. Before the end comes and brings with it the Day of Judgment, the majority of Muslims await for the coming of the Islamic Messiah, the *al-Mahdi* ("the Guided One").⁶¹

Islam, like other Abrahamic faiths, teaches that, as the end approaches, one special human being, a messiah, will reveal himself to the entire world. The expectation

⁶⁰ According to some Muslim scholars, there are several signs that will precede the Last Day. Some of these signs are based on passages from the Qur'an and the Hadiths. Modern Muslim interpreters have read contemporary events - such as Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and the war in Iraq - directly into these prophecies, hence suggesting that the end is indeed near (Hassan 2008).

⁶¹ "...a uniquely Islamic eschatology" is "centered in the Hidden Imam [Mahdi]" who will "return on the Day of Judgment to restore justice on earth" (Aslan 2005, 186).

about the revealing of this extraordinary individual, simply called the Mahdi from this point on, is expressed in the following words as a universalistic sentiment:

A figure more legendary than that of the Mahdi, the Awaited Saviour, has not been seen in the history of mankind. The threads of the world events have woven many a fine design in human life but the pattern of the Mahdi stands high above every other pattern. He has been the vision of the visionaries in history. He has been the dream of all the dreamers of the world. For the ultimate salvation of mankind he is the Pole Star of hope on which the gaze of humanity is fixed. (Mutahhari and al-Sadr 1979, np)

The universalistic desire for the messianic Mahdi may be questionable, yet his importance for Islamic eschatology and politics is not. Thus, in this chapter I will focus on the person of the Mahdi and his relevance for Muslims' political hopes. A few observations on how I will proceed with this discussion are in order here. Note that, like Christianity, the topic of eschatology in Islam is vast and complex. Hence, the emphasis is on a single but essential element of this issue: Mahdism. Also, while Mahdism itself is an extensive subject – there are, for instance, doctrinal differences between Sunni and Shia on this matter - my stress will be on the Shia understanding of the Mahdi for two main reasons. First, it is in Shiism that this messianic figure has been more prominent (Cook 2002). As Sachedina points out,

...the belief in the appearance of the Islamic messiah became a salient feature of Shiite Islam, especially Imami Shiism, where the conviction of the advent of the Mahdi, the twelfth Imam, continues to be expressed in the most repeated Shia prayer: 'May God hasten release from suffering through his (the Imam's) rise.' (Sachedina 1981, 3)

The other rationale for emphasizing Mahdism from a Shia perspective is because of what happened in the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This Middle Eastern country, where the majority of the population follows the Twelver Shiism version of

Islam, went through a revolution in the 1970s that changed the nation's socio-political structure (Skocpol 1994).⁶² The Iranian revolutionary movement, some authors have argued, had as one of its major components a strong Mahdistic element (Tucker 2008; Arjomand 1988). Of course, the eschatological factor was not the single motivation behind the revolutionary impetus of the *coup d'état* headed by Ayatollah Khomeini. There were other crucial theoretical and ideological ingredients associated with this movement, such as the influence of a Marxist worldview and, among the Iranian intellectual elite, a strong empathy and identification with the late twentieth-century emancipative political attempts in the Third World.⁶³ Nonetheless, the eschatological aspect of Khomeini's insurrection was real, undeniable and considerable. As Rapoport stated,

Messianism was manifestly present in the Iranian revolution. A clause in Iran's constitution anticipates the coming of the Hidden Imam, and his birthday has always been one of the major holy days in Iran's calendar...After the 1960s Khomeini served as *marja'*, whose authority represents guardianship on behalf of the Hidden Imam [the Mahdi], and as such he was able to give a strictly religious institution a crucial political function. Khomeini was called Imam, which has the connotation of a messianic precursor. (Rapoport 1993, 449)

I will have more to say on the Mahdistic focus of the Iranian revolution later.

Before I proceed it is important to point out, first, that, if one takes into account the impact of Mahdism in informing some elements of the Islamic revolution that affected this important Middle Eastern country, Iran is a crucial case study regarding the

⁶² Twelver Shiism is the largest branch of Shia Islam. One of the central convictions of this group is their belief in the twelve divinely appointed leaders, the Twelve Imams, from which the Mahdi proceeds. For a more detailed discussion on Twelver Shiism, see Momen (1985).

⁶³ One of the mentors of the Iranian revolution, Ali Shariati, who spent some time in Europe and received his doctorate from the Sorbonne, was considerably influenced by the writings of Karl Marx (Halm 1997). See Skocpol's (1994) *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, especially pages 240-59, for other possible reasons. Arjomand (1988), however, seems skeptical about some of Skocpol's arguments regarding Iran.

significance of Islamic end-times beliefs and their relationship with political thought. Second, despite the clear messianic nature of the Iranian revolution, and other Mahdistic movements in Muslim societies, the eschatological aspect of these political conflicts has been, for the most part, ignored (Ibrahim 2004; Sachedina 1981; Tucker 2008; Furnish 2005). Furnish (2005), however, warns against such an oversight by suggesting that Mahdism is a powerful political force and it has been “an incredibly potent source of revolutionary and often violent regime change from Morocco to India” (162). Hence, to better understand why Mahdism has been such a catalyst for Islamic and Iranian politics it is necessary to briefly explain who this Messianic person is by outlining the traditional teaching and the scriptural origins concerning the Muslim Awaited Savior.

The *al-Mahdi*: The Awaited Messiah

The *al-Mahdi*, which literally means “the rightly guided one” or simply “the guided one,” refers to the individual who will come at the end of time to establish a just and equitable socioeconomic global system (Madelung 1986; Sachedina 1981). Perhaps even more important for Muslims, the Mahdi is the person who will finally implement Islam as the ultimate religious faith throughout the world (Hassan 2008; Furnish 2005, 5; Boyer 2008, 69; Cook 2008, 80; Sachedina 1981, 173). The Mahdi is in essence the embodiment of a specific eschatological expectation which affirm that the Islamic faith will, as explained in the Qur’an and Hadith, triumph over all other religious and political ideologies that now oppress and deceive humankind (Hassan 2008). Overall, the Imam Mahdi represents the archetypical redeemer/political leader, who will rectify all wrongs

and injustices by spreading Allah's rule around the globe. He will achieve his objectives by applying his "political strength, wisdom," and "the vast knowledge that he will have acquired in various disciplines" (Hassan 2008, 49).

In Shiism, the doctrine of the Mahdi has its roots in the religious and political struggle that ensued at the time of the Prophet Muhammad's death. According to Muslims, the Prophet was not only the key figure in the establishment of the Islamic faith but, through his political acumen, he was also the underlying force in the reconciliation of diverse ethnic groups. Such was the impact of the Prophet's leadership in uniting these clans that the traditional Muslim understanding is that "in the last year of his death Muhammad was the ruler of almost the whole Arabia" (Watt 1961, 222). Rogerson (2007) puts the effectiveness of the Prophet's leadership even more forcefully when he affirms that, under Muhammad, "a band of some eighty penniless refugees" eventually conquered the known world under one single banner, "the banner of Islam" (2). Hence, by the end of Muhammad's twenty-three year mission there was the overall realization that the Islamic faith had become central to the unity and power of the tribes that followed him (Ramadan 2007; Al-Mubarkpuri 2002). But if during his lifetime Muhammad was able to bring peace and agreement among various groups, his death brought bitter disputes regarding the manner and the qualifications of those who would take his place. It is in the conflictual events that followed the Prophet's succession that the political and messianic figure of the Mahdi crystallized.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ The expression *mahdi* had been used in the beginning of Islam simply as an honorific title. It is in the context of the struggle for Muhammad's succession that the term acquired its eschatological nuance (Madelung 1986).

Muslims believe that Muhammad's mission as a Prophet was unique and without any previous or subsequent equivalent. Thus, according to Islam, he was not to have any type of heir concerning his prophethood (Schuon 1987). Nonetheless, as a political leader, the vacancy created by Muhammad's death was considerable and had to be filled lest the lack of leadership undo much of the Prophet's hard earned unity among his people.⁶⁵ But divisions were inevitable. One of the central disputes surrounding Muhammad's replacement concentrated on the *nature* of the succession. On one side of the spectrum, there were those who strongly believed that Muhammad's political heir would have to be chosen by and from the *community of believers (umma)*, which congregated the bearers and keepers of his revelation. Conversely, there were the adherents to the belief that the bestowing of leadership had to be upon someone closer to the Prophet, ultimately someone from his own *family*. The former group nominated a prominent companion of the Prophet, Abu Bakr, as his successor and the first *caliph* (Doi 1987). The latter faction disagreed with such a choice and gave their allegiance to 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin. It then ensues that the first major crisis in Islam was one of political leadership legitimation which has repercussions until this day. In fact, the major contemporary division in Islam is between those who followed Bakr, known as the Sunnis⁶⁶; and 'Ali's sympathizer, who belong to the Shia⁶⁷ community.

⁶⁵ The fissures in the Muslim community can be observed from "its inception, but principally during the course of its rapid and far-ranging expansion, the religio-political community (*umma*) established by the Prophet had to absorb a variety of social groups with very different traditions and interest. Their integration was never completely successful, and points of fracture were obvious from the beginning" (Halm 1997, 4).

⁶⁶ The word *Sunni* means "the people of the *Sunna*" The *Sunna* is a collection of narratives about the practices of the Prophet and his companions. As Doi (1987) explains, the "Sunnis are of the opinion that it was a result of Divine Wisdom and Providence that all the male children of the Prophet died in his lifetime

Since then, the history of Sunnis and Shiites has been marked by several disputes and bloody conflicts against each other.⁶⁸

‘Ali was, according to the Shia, the natural choice as the *umma*’s leader because he was not only the Prophet’s cousin and one of his closest companion but also the first person to acknowledge Muhammad’s mission as an emissary from God. This small but significant detail about ‘Ali’s spiritual awareness was vital for his supporters, since, in their understanding, Muhammad’s successor had to be, like the Prophet, both the political head (*caliph*) of the Muslim community and its spiritual guide (*imam*) (Momen 1985).⁶⁹ To the Shia, ‘Ali’s indispensable qualification as heir to the Prophet, besides being his cousin, was ‘Ali’s marriage to Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad. ‘Ali was both the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law, thus fulfilling the Shia expectation that Muhammad’s successor was to come from within his own household (Momen 1985; Sachedina 1981).⁷⁰ Finally, the Shiites reinforced all their arguments in favor of ‘Ali with the concluding observation that, in the last year of his life, Muhammad made

and that under Divine Inspiration he kept the question of his succession open, leaving it to the *umma* (community of Islam) to decide the most competent person to become leader of the *umma*.” (148)

⁶⁷ The word *Shia* simply means “*following*.” Jafri (1987) points out that the “belief that religious guidance must come from the descendents of the Prophet is taken in Shiism from the Qur’anic concept of the exalted and virtuous families of the prophets. In all ages, the prophets have been particularly concerned with ensuring that the special favor of God is bestowed upon them for the guidance of man be maintained in their families and pass to their descendants.” (161).

⁶⁸ The most prominent and recent one was the 1980s Iran (where the Shia is a majority) – Iraq (where the majority of inhabitants are Sunni) war.

⁶⁹ As for political credentials, the Shiites pointed to ‘Ali’s ability as a military man and his role as Muhammad’s secretary in dealings with diverse tribes. The high regard of ‘Ali among Shiites is expressed by Mahmud Shahabi (1988) when he affirms that ‘Ali “was seconded only to Muhammad” (15).

⁷⁰ ‘Ali and Fatima’s two children, Hasan and Hussain, who also played important roles in the Prophet’s succession, were the only surviving grandchildren of Muhammad. According to Shahabi (1988), Muhammad was “very fond” of his grandchildren and he “used to honor them in every occasion, at the mosque and at home, and called them his children and the best youth of Heaven” (15).

explicit that his son-in-law was to succeed him. According to a Sunni Hadith, Ibn Hanbal reports that, at the time of Muhammad's final journey to Medina, the Prophet

...took Ali by hand and said to the people: 'Do you not acknowledge that I have a greater claim on each of the believers than they have on themselves?' And they replied: 'Yes!' And he took Ali's hand and said: 'Of whomsoever I am Lord [*Mawla*], then Ali is also his Lord. O God! Be Thou the supporter of whoever supports Ali and the enemy of whoever opposes him.' And Umar met him [Ali] after this and said to him: 'Congratulations, O son of Abu Talib! Now morning and evening [i. e. forever] you are the master of every believing man and woman.' (quoted in Momen 1985, 15)

Despite all the reasons supporting 'Ali's succession many Muslims still gave their allegiance to Bakr as the first *caliph* (Momen 1985; Halm 1997). 'Ali resisted the temptation of dividing the Muslim community over Bakr's nomination and kept a conciliatory attitude. Eventually, 'Ali himself would become the fourth *caliph* and the first Shia Imam.⁷¹ But after 'Ali was assassinated by Sunnis, the rivalry between these two groups would intensify.⁷² The Shiites then looked at 'Ali's sons as the rightful rulers of the *umma*. Abu Muhammad Hasan ibn 'Ali, 'Ali's elder son, became the second Shia Imam. However, Hasan, under pressure by the Sunnis, eventually abdicated this position and retired in Medina. Hasan's younger brother, Husayn, became the third Imam but, unlike Hasan, he refused to relinquish power and was martyred at Karbala.⁷³ After Husayn, there would be nine more successors to the Prophet Muhammad through

⁷¹ Momen (1985) points out that it "can be said that 'Ali's succession to the Caliphate was approved of and accepted by the vast majority of Muslims in Medina and also in most of the provinces of the Empire. He was truly a Caliph chosen by a consensus of all Muslims. After the initial euphoria wore off, however, it became clear that he was faced with grave internal problems" (24).

⁷² The events surrounding 'Ali's ascension to the Caliphate and his death are the first instances of Muslims taking up arms against Muslims (Halm 1997).

⁷³ Husayn's martyrdom in Karbala is still an important part of the Shia tradition. Cole (2002) observed that "the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson, Husayn, on the battlefield of Karbala in A.D. 680 gave [the Shiites] a highly emotive and resilient mythos from which to draw strength" (16).

the lineage of ‘Ali. As Shia traditions suggest, all were killed by poisoning with the exception of the twelfth Imam known as Muhammad al-Mahdi.⁷⁴ It is this last Imam who will be of concern to us from this point on.

As noted, the term Mahdi refers to an Islamic eschatological figure who will come at the end-times to bring justice to the world. In Shia Islam, this person is the twelfth Imam who, as tradition goes, went into *occultation* between A. D. 873-75.⁷⁵ The Shia doctrine of the occultation establishes the belief that Muhammad al-Mahdi did not die, but that he has been hidden by God from human eyes because the Imam’s life, as was the case with those who preceded him through the lineage of ‘Ali, was in danger. During his occultation, the Hidden Imam’s existence has been miraculously extended until the time when God will permit him to come back.⁷⁶ Sachedina (1981) explains that the “occultation or *ghayba* of the messianic Imam was the central belief” in Shia Mahdism and a source of intrinsic hope for those who await the rise of the Hidden Imam who will “adjust the present unbearable historical circumstances in favor of the oppressed” (78).

Despite the firm Shia belief in the Mahdi and his occultation, there are some Muslim scholars who argue that the difficulties with this messianic figure are considerable.⁷⁷ The most troublesome concern, according to critics, is the lack of direct

⁷⁴ The details about these Imams’ lives will not be considered here for it is not crucial to my discussion on the Mahdi. See Momen 1985; Sachedina 1981; and Halm 1997, for more careful accounts of the Imamate.

⁷⁵ Arjo mand (1996) explains that the Occultation was, among other things, a political move by the Sh iites as it “was adopted in a desperate effort to solve the immediate problems of Imamate and succession in the second half of the ninth century” (548).

⁷⁶ The doctrine of Occultation is rather complex. For extended discussions on this Shia belief, see Sachedina (1978); Sachedina (1981); Hussain (1982); Arjo mand (1996); Cook (2002).

⁷⁷ Cf. Furnish (2005).

Qur'anic references about the Mahdi. Yet such a damaging accusation does not intimidate believers. They counter that there are Qur'anic passages which can be rendered, though esoterically, as referring to the Islamic messiah. Passages such "O, but I call to witness the planets, the stars which rise and set" has been understood by Shia scholars as referring to the Mahdi and his occultation from human eyes (Qur'an 1983, 81:15-6). This passage is interpreted to mean that, like a shooting star, the Hidden Imam will reappear and all the earth will contemplate his manifestation (Hussain 1982, 15). Another Qur'anic verse used by the Shia is the following one which, according to believers, affirms that the Day of Judgment actually presupposes the appearance of *al-Mahdi*.⁷⁸

And of mankind are some who say, we believe in Allah and the Last Day, when they believe not. They think to beguile Allah and those who believe, but they beguile none save themselves, but they perceive not; (Qur'an 1983, 2:8-9)⁷⁹

If the Qur'an has scarce and quite unclear references to the Mahdi, like the previous passage, the same cannot be affirmed about many Hadiths, including some attributed to the Prophet Muhammad himself.⁸⁰ In fact, there are several traditions that mention this eschatological figure and they are very specific in describing aspects of the Mahdi's arrival and origin. A good example is one attributed to the Prophet, quoted by Sadr,

Moreover about him the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.A.) has said the following: "If there remains not more than a day from the life of the earth, God Almighty will

⁷⁸ These somewhat esoteric interpretations of Qur'anic passages represent the desire to establish Mahdism within the confines of the authoritative boundaries of Muslim tradition. See Hussain (1982) and Sadr (1994) for a more detailed discussion on Mahdism and the Qur'an.

⁷⁹ Cf. also Qur'an (1983, 70:26).

⁸⁰ Since there is no direct "mention of the Mahdi in the Qur'an, Muslims looked for the Hadith for insight into the second coming of the Hidden Imam" (Aslan 2005, 186).

set the day so long, until a person from my progeny who carries the same name as mine, shall appear and fill the earth with Justice opposite the extent it had been filled with injustice and oppression.” (Sadr 1994, 28)

Another tradition highlights a few aspect of the Mahdi’s physical appearance, as it affirms that

Abu Said al-Khudri reported God’s messenger as saying, “The Mahdi would be of my stock, and will have a broad forehead and a prominent nose. He will fill the world with equity and justice, as it was filled with oppression and tyranny and will rule for seven years.” (Sadr 1994, 122)

These Hadiths are only a sample of the body of traditions used to support the Shia belief in the Mahdi and his coming.⁸¹ Despite the curious and superficial elements such as the mentioning of the size of the Mahdi’s forehead and nose, these sayings are important because they reinforce his messianic authority. Indeed, in many Hadiths, including the aforementioned ones, the Islamic messiah is portrayed as having the undeniable spiritual and political clout to set the world on a just and equitable path when he arrives.

Moreover, for the Shiites, the Hadiths’ emphasis on the Mahdi being from the Prophet’s progeny is obviously very significant. It is this familial association with Muhammad that ultimately underscores the Hidden Imam’s authority, because, for Shiites, only the Prophet’s and ‘Ali’s descendent is to be considered the rightful leader of *all* Muslims (Berkey 2003, 137). Consequently, the twelfth Imam has the right to require unconditional obedience from the entire *umma* in all its affairs. In other words, as the Prophet’s living offspring, the Hidden Imam is the “Vicar of God on Earth” and “all political authority and sovereignty is his,” which implies that, in Shiism, the

⁸¹ For a more comprehensive list of Hadiths about the Mahdi, see Sadr (1994).

eschatological hope centered on the figure of the Mahdi is as much a religious doctrine (the divine occultation being its centerpiece) as it is a political one (Momen 1985, 150).

The latter comes across in al-Sadr's portrayal of this messiah, when he affirms that the Hidden Imam

...is not merely a source of consolation, but it is also a source of virtue and strength. It is a source of virtue because the belief in the Mahdi means the total elimination of injustice and oppression prevailing in the world. It is a source of inexhaustible strength because it provides hope which enables man to resist frustration, howsoever, hopeless and dismal the circumstances may be. The belief in the appointed day proves that it is possible for the forces of justice to face the world filled with injustice and oppression, to prevail upon the forces of injustice and to reconstruct the world order. (quoted in Walbridge 1997, 165)

No wonder that, in Shiism, the anticipation about the return of the Mahdi from occultation is the cornerstone of their political eschatology. The suggestion that the Hidden Imam will "prevail upon the forces of injustice" and "reconstruct the world order" is a powerful source of hope for many Muslims as they anticipate a complete transformation of the existent socio-political structure in their favor. Hence, the prayer "May God hasten release from suffering through his (Mahdi's) rise," one of the most common petitions among the Shiites,

...reflects their hopes in the realization of the rule of justice and equity [which is] embodied in the promise of the appearance of the Mahdi. Under such a rule the loyal Shia of the twelve Imams will find their exalted position, and under the just government of a world free from "oppression and tyranny." (Sachedina 1981, 173)

Despite all the emphasis on the twelfth Imam's authority and his role as the rightful ruler of the *umma*, the present difficulty that faces the Shia community, however, is quite remarkable. According to the doctrine of Occultation, the Mahdi still remains hidden and, without the Imam, there is no leader who can guide this community

in a completely lawful and rightful manner. His absence leaves a major gap in the *umma*'s socio-political organization by turning any government "ipso facto illegitimate" (Sivan 1990, 189). Confronted with this impractical political conundrum, the Shiites came to rely on the concept of the *ulama*.⁸² The *ulama*, the collection of men (scholars/jurists) learned in Islamic law, is in charge of maintaining the community's religious and political institutions during the Imam's occultation. Note, once again, that the legitimate right to rule the *umma* is the Hidden Imam's prerogative. The existence of the *ulama* does not deny this fact. On the contrary, the *ulama*, at least theoretically, maintains, in clear sight, the belief in the exclusive rights of the Mahdi by not arrogating for itself any innate political sanction to lead the believers. The *ulama* only claims to be the Imam's representative, with limited ability to oversee the community as an extension of His authority (Akhavi 1980; Momen 1985).

The Hidden Imam's claim over the *umma*'s socio-political matters also creates a considerable dilemma for secular rulers in Shia Islamic communities, as is the case of Iran. For instance, in commenting on the political situation in Iran during the crisis that led to that country's revolution in the seventies, some commentators suggest that one of the reasons for the collapse of Reza Pahlevi's regime was the Shah's assumption that the Mahdi's authority could be set aside as a mean of establishing a new and secular political outlook for the nation (Momen 1985; Akhavi 1980; Halm 1997; Sivan 1990). But, as Halm observes, "the threat based on the authority of the Hidden Imam constantly

⁸² The *ulama* was already in existence in the beginning of Islam, but it took shape and developed as an institution only after the occultation of the Mahdi (Akhavi 1980).

hung over the Shah's throne like the sword of Damocles" (Halm 1997, 110). In the end, the Shah's political aspirations proved to be his undoing as the *ulama* led protests that emphasized what the clergy understood to be the king's intentional effort to undermine the Imam's political rights (Akhavi 1980, 12). But I will return to this point later in this chapter.

One final observation on the scope of the Hidden Imam's authority is, however, necessary. As already suggested, his claims are not limited to the Shia community. Granted, at a first instance, his right to govern begins with that group of believers and then extends to all Muslims. But, according to Islamic eschatology, in the final analysis, his is an all-encompassing authority to govern, since it is of a universalistic character. This simply means that the Imam's rule does not end with the *umma* but it extends to all nations and peoples. The main assumption here is that obedience to him is required from the entire humankind, because the Mahdi's main purpose and goal is the fulfillment of two crucial end-times Islamic expectations (Momen 1985, 150). The first is political and it asserts that, when he comes back from his occultation, he will establish a global government of equality and justice that transcends political boundaries. Mutahhari and al-Sadr state that,

[i]n fact, a very happy and bright future awaits humanity. A great man will appear who will uproot all corruption and mischief. This is a religiously inspired theory and it is in this context that Islam gives the glad tidings of Mahdi's revolution. Its salient features will be: ...Final victory of righteousness, virtue, peace, justice, freedom and truth over the forces of egoism, subjugation, tyranny, deceit and fraud... establishment of a world government (one government in the whole world). (Mutahhari and al-Sadr 1979, np)

The second is a religious expectation that underscores the Islamic character of the Imam Mahdi's world government. Indeed, one of the first sanctions under the Mahdistic rule is the Islamicizing of the entire world.⁸³ The followers of all religions, for instance, will finally accept Islam as the only true faith and profess their belief in one God, just as it is said in the Qur'an: "...to Him [Allah] submits (*aslama*) whoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and to Him [Allah] shall they be returned" (Qur'an 1983, 3:82). When the Imam's global government takes place and the Qur'an becomes the basis for faith and ethical behavior, only then will an utterly just society come to pass with the establishment of a perfect socio-political Islamic system. Sachedina describes this anticipation of a faultless Mahdistic government by pointing to the salient belief that the Hidden Imam

...even now is the invisible ruler of the world but does not manifest himself directly in human society. In his absence every form of government is of necessity, imperfect, for the imperfection of men is reflected in their political institutions. (Sachedina 1981, 166)

The Influence of Mahdis m in the Iranian Revolution

During the period of occultation, when the twelfth Imam waits to implement his perfect and ideal worldwide religio-political Islamic state, there have been attempts to change entire governmental structures using the Mahdistic doctrine as a revolutionary rationale. Some of these movements have been more successful than others (Bermann

⁸³ "When the promised Mahdi, the twelfth Imam (peace be upon him), appears, following his victory over the evil forces of the world, he will administer the entire world under one Islamic government...The entire earth will flourish under their administration. The Mahdi will distantly oversee the whole earth himself, with its widespread regions and extensive affairs accessible to him like the palm of his hand...The entire earth will be filled with justice and equity" (Amini 1996 np). Also cf. Sachedina (1981, 174).

1932; Holt 1970; Shaked 1978; Lubeck 1985; Heine 2000).⁸⁴ As the abovementioned example of Iran under Shah Reza Pahlevi suggests, one of the most significant and successful attempts to use Mahdism as an activist ideology was the Islamic Revolution headed by the Ayatollah Sayyid Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini.

Before Ayatollah Khomeini took power and transformed Iran into an Islamic Republic, the country, under Reza Pahlevi, was in a severe political crisis.⁸⁵ The Shah's leadership problems were greatly aggravated with his final efforts to liberalize the country's educational, religious and political institutions, which were seen as overstepping his boundaries.⁸⁶ As the Shah tried to reform the Iranian society to conform to his liberal political goals, he was perceived by his adversaries as ultimately placing in question the *ulama*'s authority.⁸⁷ As the group in charge of overseeing the nation's socio-political and religious institutions in the Imam Mahdi's absence, the *ulama* understood that, if Pahlevi's reforms took effect, as an elite, it would have its influence and financial resources greatly diminished. To defend their status and rights,

⁸⁴ Furnish (2005) explains that "[n]umerous times over the last 14 centuries of Islamic history self-professed mahdis have tried to fulfill the traditions by fomenting rebellion against allegedly illegitimate governments (usually, but not always, Muslim) in the name of installing more Islamic and egalitarian Mahdist regimes. Most aspiring mahdis soon found that such a impudent claim amounted to signing their own death warrants. However, a number of particularly politically and militarily adroit individuals have, with a little luck, succeeded over the years not only in inciting religious revolution but in taking power as Mahdis for at least a time" (30).

⁸⁵ The political nuances and miscalculations of Pahlevi's rule have been dealt with in other works. See Arjomand (1988) and Skocpol (1994) for partial but incisive discussions on the subject.

⁸⁶ Through Pahlevi's reforms "Iran was to become 'modern' and 'like France' by the year 2000, overcoming its 'medieval' heritage and institutions, with the clergy and the covered bazaars serving as the shah's *betès noires*" (Cole 2002, 196).

⁸⁷ Khomeini's revolution was not necessarily anti-modern, rather the movement was anti-liberal. As Khomeini saw it, Pahlevi's liberal attempts would have greatly diminished the role of religion in Iranian society (Cole 2002; Holmes 1993).

several clergymen, through Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership, helped in the destabilization of Pahlevi's government (Cole 2002).⁸⁸ As Akhavi pointed out,

[t]he *ulama* did not by themselves, make the revolution of 1978-1979. The collapse of the political system, culminating in the departure of the Shah..., the resignation of the caretaker government..., and the referendum in favor of the Islamic Republic...was nevertheless directed by the clergy. (Akhavi 1980, 171)

As a clergyman and a leader of the *ulama*, Khomeini had a central role in attacking Pahlevi's state. With the express purpose of bringing this political regime down, the Ayatollah conveniently framed the Shah's efforts of liberalization in Iran as amounting to a direct attack on Islam (Khomeini 1981, 26-27).⁸⁹ The Ayatollah suggested that, if the Shah's liberal reforms were implemented, Islam would be reduced to nothing more than a personal code of ethics. In this regard, the Prophet's message would lose its socio-political influence by becoming only a marginal and devotional expression of a privatized religion, which would restrict it to the sphere of spiritual personal concerns alone. In Khomeini's (1981) *The Governance of the Jurist*, he argued instead for the comprehensiveness of the Islamic faith as claiming authority over all parts of life. Islam, as a religion, could not be confined to particular areas of one's existence such as ritual practices or laws concerning menstruation and child-birth (Khomeini 1981). Indeed, the Islamic belief system, according to Khomeini, makes clear demands on all realms of life, including social, political and religious ones. Such comprehensive argument, for the Ayatollah, was the very foundational teaching

⁸⁸ Despite its authority as the Hidden Imam's representatives, most of the time the *ulama* in Shiism tend to maintain a quietist attitude towards political matters. The Iranian revolution is however a notable exception to this pattern (Pinault 1992; Akhavi 1980; Cole 2002).

⁸⁹ Cf. Rose (1983).

presented in the Islamic scriptures. As Khomeini explained,

[t]he ratio of Qur'anic verses concerned with the affairs of society to those concerned with ritual worship is greater than a hundred to one. Of the approximately fifty sections of the corpus of *hadith* containing all the ordinances of Islam, not more than three or four sections relate to matters of ritual worship and the duties of man toward his Creator and Sustainer. A few more are concerned with questions of ethics, and all the rest are concerned with social, economic, legal, and political questions—in short, the gestation of society. (Khomeini 1981, 29)

But the dismantling of the already moribund Pahlevi government was just the first step in Khomeini's revolutionary plan for Iran. The momentous issue, for the Ayatollah and his fellow radical clergy, was the legitimization of an Islamic theocratic government, predating the return of the Mahdi. But, on this issue, Khomeini was faced with a considerable dilemma. Despite Khomeini's and the clergy's influence and status among the Shiites, their direct involvement in politics could never be a legitimate claim. The Shia *ulama* had only a supervising role in the religious and political life of the country, but unhindered management of the state's temporal affairs was not part of their job description as religious jurists.⁹⁰ Khomeini, however, was about to change this time-honored Shia tradition by arguing that the *ulama*'s passive political behavior was incompatible with the example put forth by the Prophet and the Imams. For Khomeini, direct political participation by the Shia *ulama* - which under Pahlevi's rule was running the risk of becoming an irrelevant institution of a privatized religious faith - was

⁹⁰ Some of the traditional issues concerning the *ulama* were the “the guardianship over the persons and property of those who might otherwise be victimized,” “the guardianship over the property and activities upon which the religious life of the community depends,” general guardianship over the welfare of the Muslim community, “encompassing the responsibility of serving as a social force aimed at carrying out the Qur'anic injunction to ‘command the good and forbid the reprehensible’” (Rose 1983, 169).

demanded by Islam. In his encouragement of the clergy to take political action the Ayatollah suggested that

[i]n order to clarify the matter further, let us pose the following question. From the time of the Lesser Occultation down to the present (a period of more than twelve centuries that may continue for hundreds of millennia if it is not appropriate for the Occulted Imam to manifest himself), is it proper that the laws of Islam be cast aside and remain unexecuted, so that everyone acts as he pleases and anarchy prevails? Were the laws that the Prophet of Islam labored so hard for twenty-three years to set forth, promulgate, and execute valid only for a limited period of time? Was everything pertaining to Islam meant to be abandoned after the Lesser Occultation? Anyone who believes so, or voices such a belief, is worse situated than the person who believes and proclaims that Islam has been superseded or abrogated by another supposed revelation. (Khomeini 1981, 42)

Khomeini's objectives, however, would require more than an argumentative exhortation about the *ulama's* political engagement in light of Islamic teaching. Indeed, to succeed, Khomeini had to deal with the Twelver Shiism doctrine of the Hidden Imam's legitimate authority and the *ulama's* place in it as simple guardian - not the executer - of the Mahdi's political power. Conveniently, the Ayatollah, then, re-interpreted some of the well-established beliefs about the secondary socio-political role of the *ulama* during the Imam Mahdi's occultation. Mainly, Khomeini achieved his goal by putting forth the idea that Shia clerics were now to be perceived not only as guardians and judges of the country's social, political and religious realms but, as experts in the Islamic traditions and laws, they had the unquestionable right to assume political power, if the circumstances required. In Khomeini's reinterpretation, the expert jurists of the *ulama* did not have the same authority as the Hidden Imam, but, they could, as his representatives, carry on the same political functions as the Mahdi (Momen 1985; Saad-Ghorayeb 2002). This re-assessment of the role of the *ulama*, which allowed the clerics

to get directly involved in politics, became embodied in Khomeini's construal of what became known as the *velayat-e faqih*, or the "government of the experts."⁹¹ Khomeini's central doctrine, as expressed in his *velayat-e faqih*, defended the *ulama*'s right "to exercise direct political authority and conduct the day-to-day operations of the government, particularly in times of danger and impending chaos, on behalf of the Hidden Twelfth Imam" (Rose 1983, 170).

For the first time in Shiism, the "government of the experts" doctrine transformed the *ulama* from a symbolical representation of the Mahdi's rule into a real, legitimate and decisive political force. The *ulama* now had the obligation to anticipate the just kingdom expected in the future coming of the Mahdi by directly assuming political power, because, after Khomeini, "the mandate of the Shiite jurist on behalf of the Hidden Imam...included the right to rule" (Arjomand 1988, 148).⁹² In this regard, Khomeini revived the millenarian-Mahdistic norm of authority and shaped it into a political ideology to claim legitimacy to his own Islamic revolution. Note that if, before Khomeini, the *ulama* never claimed for itself any ruling rights in the place of the Hidden Imam, after the Iranian revolution this claim became so intrinsically associated with that institution that Khomeini, as its leader, started to be addressed as *Imam*. In Shiism, calling a religious expert by the title of imam is not uncommon, but in Khomeini's case

⁹¹ After the revolution, Khomeini's doctrine found its way into the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution: "It is hereby declared that it is for *the learned doctors of theology* (may God prolong the blessing of their existence!) to determine whether such laws as may be proposed are or are not conformable to the principles of Islam; and it is therefore officially enacted that there shall at all times exist a Committee composed of not less than five mujtahids [Islamic jurists] other devout theologians, cognizant also of the requirements of the age, in this manner..." ([emphasis added] Baktiari 1996, 9).

⁹² Cf. also Halm (1997).

he never made an effort to deny the eschatological meaning of the title.⁹³ In fact, he assumed the millenarian role by letting “currency be given to the idea that he was the forerunner of the Mahdi” (Arjomand 1988, 152).⁹⁴

Curiously, in the end, the Iranian revolution itself, not only Khomeini, assumed a millenarian status among the population. In place of the Shah’s secular government, the Ayatollah introduced a theocracy based on the expectation that, through the Iranians, the return of the Mahdi and the implementation of his worldwide kingdom were being paved. This overwhelming feeling of hopeful eschatological anticipation can be observed in one of the most common slogan associated with the Revolution: “O God, O God, keep Khomeini until the revolution of the Mahdi.” Some people, in fact, at the climax of this movement, started to have sightings of the Mahdi. In one of such glimpse, a man reported that the Hidden Imam told him that “Your prayer, ‘O God, O God, keep Khomeini until the revolution of the Mahdi,’ has expedited my Advent by a few hundred years” (Arjomand 1988, 152).

The movement led by Khomeini left some lasting and significant marks on the contemporary history of Islam and particularly on the Iranian society.⁹⁵ Recently, however, some have claimed that, after the Ayatollah’s death, the Islamic revolution lost its appeal and objectives. This assertion may have some merit. There seems to be a growing dissatisfaction with the theocratic government in Iran as the revolution’s several

⁹³ The expression *imam* does not necessarily carry millenarian connotations. The term can be used for the person who leads the prayers at the mosque, for instance. Yet, when the term is applied to Khomeini it often implies a messianic meaning.

⁹⁴ Furnish (2008) also explains that “rumors swirled during the heady days after Iran’s 1979 revolution that Ayatollah Khomeini was the Mahdi, or at least his herald.” (17).

⁹⁵ See Saad-Ghorayeb (2002) for an assessment of Khomeini’s doctrine of the *velayat-e faqih*’s influence on the most prominent political party in Lebanon. Cf. also Nakash 2006.

promises did not come to fruition (Takeyh 2006). Yet one of the aspects of the movement started by Khomeini that has shown continual endurance among several Iranian leaders is the millenarian element. The eschatological characteristic of the revolution and its distinctly Mahdistic emphasis are still very much evident in the rhetoric of some prominent Iranian political figures who are trying to cling to Khomeini's legacy. Among these leaders is Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Mahdism and Contemporary Iranian Leadership: Preparing the Way

The eschatological Mahdistic tendencies of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad have been recently observed by several commentators.⁹⁶ In one particular instance, during the Iranian president's address to the sixtieth session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2005, such a belief openly interacted with his public functions. At that meeting of world leaders, the central issue in Ahmadinejad's agenda was the defense of the Islamic Republic of Iran's right to develop a nuclear program. In his speech, Ahmadinejad made several passing comments on spirituality and religion; yet he kept his focus on the urgent matter at hand. Indeed, Ahmadinejad presented several reasons why, according to Iranian and international policies, his country should be allowed to enter the club of nations that have access to nuclear power. What caught the attention of

⁹⁶ For instance, Cook (2008) suggests that Ahmadinejad's Mahdism equates to "governmental messianism" and that "Ahmadinejad, more than any of his predecessors, including Ayatollah Khomeini, has emphasized the role of messianism in his public speeches, and has to some extent benefited from popularity in Iran as a result" (87). Hassan (2008) adds that Ahmadinejad "is also driven by the conviction that he himself must somehow prepare the way for the Messiah's or Mahdi's arrival by establishing a government in Iran that would honor and facilitate his mission to defeat the 'infidel' armies" (58).

many, however, was not Ahmadinejad's reasoning about Iran's nuclear aspirations. Rather what some observers found intriguing was the president's final remarks about the Mahdi, the Islamic Messiah who, as pointed out earlier, should return from occultation in the end-times. Interestingly, reflecting much of my previous discussion on the Mahdi, Ahmadinejad argued before the world's audience that

[f]rom the beginning of time, humanity has longed for the day when justice, peace, equality and compassion envelop the world. All of us can contribute to the establishment of such a world. When that day comes, the ultimate promise of all Divine religions will be fulfilled with the emergence of a perfect human being who is heir to all prophets and pious men. He [the Mahdi] will lead the world to justice and absolute peace. "O mighty Lord, I pray to you to hasten the emergence of your last repository, the promised one, that perfect and pure human being, the one that will fill this world with justice and peace. (Ahmadinejad 2005, np).

As the concluding comments of his discussion on nuclear power, the Iranian president's mention of the Mahdi portrayed an optimistic, conciliatory, and positive view of the future. Indeed, much of the eschatological hopes associated with the Hidden Imam reveal a desire for justice and equality as a response to the plight of the suffering and the poor. However, some commentators have shown considerable skepticism and apprehension with Ahmadinejad's Mahdism (Naji 2008; Roy 2008). Of particular concern is the Iranian president's possible association with another Mahdist believer, the influential Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi. As one of the most senior and conservative clerics in Iran, Mesbah-Yazdi has shown his approval to Ahmadinejad's government by suggesting that the president owes his political success to the "special kindness of the Mahdi" (Naji 2008, 98).

While intriguing and highly controversial, my interest here however is not on these individuals' Mahdistic belief *per se*. Ahmadinejad's and Mesbah-Yazdi's Mahdism would have been only a curious historical footnote if it were not the fact that, for these Iranian leaders, such eschatological faith constitutes a strong element in their political thinking and praxis. Mohebat Ahdiyyih (2008) in his article *Ahmadinejad and the Mahdi* suggested that if Mesbah-Yazdi's political views are a window to what Ahmadinejad believes is a matter of political importance, the hope of a democratic movement inside Iran faces difficult times ahead. Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi, for instance, encourages "the use of violence to promote the interests of Islam and seeks to purge the republican aspect of the Islamic Republic system in favor of a pure Islamic system" (Ahdiyyih 2008, 30). Indeed, the Ayatollah sees tolerance as an abhorrent political principle and argues that "the prophets of God did not believe in pluralism. They believed that only one idea was right" (quoted in Secor 2007, np). What Mesbah-Yazdi advocates is far from a democracy much less a pluralistic one. Rather the senior clergy wants Iran to become a complete Islamic political society, which he refers to "as the nucleus of a Mahdi-led world" (Naji 2008, 99). In this regard, Naji (2008) points out that Mahdism and the belief in the "Mahdi's imminent return" go "hand in hand with a paranoid aggressive hatred of global organizations and culture, a rejection of human rights and democracy and anti-Semitism that courses through [Mesbah-Yazdi's] worldview" (109).

Of course, Mesbah-Yazdi's approval of Ahmadinejad is not a necessary indication that the president holds to the Ayatollah's violent and totalitarian political

principles. Yet, Ahmadinejad seems to have, at least, merged a similar contemptuous attitude towards Western style liberal democracy with a belief in the return of the Mahdi.⁹⁷ Some of Ahmadinejad's political views about the Hidden Imam and democracy are reflected, for instance, in speeches and papers delivered during the International Conference of Mahdism Doctrine.⁹⁸ The Conference, which has the full support of the Iranian leader, is held annually and had its first meeting in September 2005, a month after Ahmadinejad's first presidential inauguration.⁹⁹ While the purpose of the meeting is to foster a global ecumenical dialogue on Mahdism, some of the papers have unambiguous political overtones (Ahdiiyih 2008). The Conference's political character has been unquestionably set by Ahmadinejad himself.

During his opening address on the occasion of the first Conference, Ahmadinejad argued for a direct connection between the Islamic messiah and Iran's political future. According to the president, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the system of *velayat-e faqih*, as advocated by Khomeini, have "no other mission but to prepare for the establishment of a world government . . . as the Imam [Mahdi] runs and manages the

⁹⁷ Ahmadinejad's political views have had some concrete consequences for Iranian society since, as Diamond (2009) claims, the country under his presidency moved from a "somewhat pluralistic political state" to a "more extreme and repressive dictatorship" (64).

⁹⁸ See the conference website for a list of submitted papers: <http://www.mahdaviat-conference.com/en/>. Some of the papers presented in the 2006 Conference reveal a high degree of skepticism regarding democracy while holding to the Mahdist hope of a future just society. The political scientist Paul White (2006) suggests, for instance, in his article *Our Social and Political Responsibilities while Awaiting Imam al-Mahdi (as)*, that "Western academics and idealist political activists are increasingly concluding that democracy might be an ideal that can only be aspired to — and never actually achieved." He then exhorts Muslims not to try to implement democratic rule in their countries but to work for the Mahdi's return (np).

⁹⁹ During the opening of the first Conference several speakers thanked Ahmadinejad for his support and the president's remarks at that gathering "showed — yet again — his intense devotion to Mahdism as both a doctrine and a means of opposing the West, particularly the United States and Israel" (Furnish 2008, 17).

universe” (quoted in Ahdiyyih 2008, 27).¹⁰⁰ Moreover, in his speech in the 2006 gathering, Ahmadinejad pointed to the importance of Mahdism not only for Iran but to the very “survival of humanity” as well. He then continued by arguing that “humanity is rapidly realizing this reality that human prosperity, justice, love and affection and all of human dreams are attainable only through the leadership of a perfect human [the Mahdi].” The Iranian president then concluded by posing a challenge to the countries “who claim to have democracy” that “we are ready for a debate” (Ahmadinejad 2006, np). The content of such debate was not clearly specified in the speech but, Peterson has suggested that, in light of Ahmadinejad’s arguments and attitudes, such a debate with Western democracies, and especially with the United States, is being definitely cast in Mahdaviat terms. Through such a messianic perspective,

...the US - with quasireligious declarations of transforming the Middle East with democracy and justice, deploying military forces across the region, and developing a new generation of nuclear weapons - is arrogantly trying to assume the role of Mahdi. (Peterson 2005, 2)

Conclusion

To several individuals in liberal democratic Western countries, where the separation of church and state is continuously stressed, this entire Mahdistic discussion, alongside concerns about governmental legitimacy based on the authority of the Islamic messiah who went into occultation several centuries ago, may appear distant and

¹⁰⁰ Ahdiyyih (2008) explains that “[i]n follow-up seminars, speakers defined Mahdism as the ‘defining strategy of the Islamic Republic,’ a ‘comprehensive plan and strategic policy,’ and a ‘political regime and world view.’ Within that context, the conference determined not only that the Mahdi’s advent is ‘inevitable’ but also that it can be ‘accelerated’ through human action. Discussants spoke about the Iran-Iraq war as a practical example of the application of Mahdism since ‘combatants were moved by the love of the Mahdi’s representative, Khomeini, to sacrifice their lives’” (27).

anachronistic. In fact, many may have difficulty in perceiving how such an obscurantist set of beliefs in a mythical individual can have any impact or relevance for a debate on contemporary political attitudes. Yet, as the Iranian Islamic revolution and its contemporary supporters seem to demonstrate, some eschatological beliefs and expectations can ultimately turn into powerful political ideologies.

But before we leave this chapter, one final observation about the political importance of Islamic eschatology is noteworthy. While most of this chapter's discussion has concentrated on Mahdism from a Shia perspective, the belief in the coming of the Islamic messiah is also becoming widespread among the Sunni majority. Commentators have pointed out that the Sunni masses, like the Shia, have strong expectations associated with the coming of the Mahdi (Cook 2008; Hassan 2008; Furnish 2005). Hence, despite several differences, both Shiite and Sunni eschatologies give considerable prominence to the end-times appearance of this important religious-political figure (Furnish 2005; 2008). As I argued earlier, this belief's central appeal to Muslims is related to the hope that the coming of the Mahdi promises to reverse the negative socio-political conditions in which this community finds itself nowadays. Furnish explains this Muslim anticipation by stating that the Mahdi

will formulate a beneficial ideology that, when realized, will allow for the establishment of a divinely based program, one that will elevate Muslims, religiously and politically, worldwide. This divine agenda not only will restore Islam to its rightful place as the world's largest religion and master of the world but also will engender the creation of a planetary Islamic polity, called by some Mahdist literature the *dawlah Islamiyah* (the Islamic state), or alternatively the *dawlah Allah* (the state of God). Whatever it is called, the operative and overriding religio-political principle will be the Qur'an based laws and governance, replacing the *dawlat al-batil*, "illegitimate state..." (Furnish 2005, 96)

For many Muslims, Islam is perceived as one of the last ideologies resisting the secularizing, oppressing and illegitimate political influence of the West, and, within this mindset, Mahdism is the hope that such resistance will be eventually rewarded.¹⁰¹ Therefore it may be said that the belief in the Islamic messiah is, for several Muslim groups, Shiite and Sunni alike, more than a fanciful religious belief. This eschatological conviction in the Mahdi's arrival is a political statement which embodies the anticipation of millions of Muslims that there is a final Islamic socio-political solution for the decadent modern world. As several Muslims believe, including some prominent political leaders, only the Mahdi can subvert the evil global political structures by implementing a legitimate, just and equitable government.

¹⁰¹ Islamic resistance to the West and democracy, in particular, is clearly exemplified in a statement by Khomeini when he told his followers: "Don't listen to those who speak of democracy. They all are against Islam. They want to take the nation away from its mission. We will break all the poison pen of those who speak of nationalism, democracy, and such things" (quoted in Alexander and Hoenig 2008, 26).

CHAPTER V

LIBERALISM AND ESCHATOLOGY: KANT, MILL AND FUKUYAMA ON THE FUTURE OF HUMANKIND

Despite the religious emphasis of the two previous chapters on politics and eschatology, in *The Awaiting Millennium: A History of End-Time Thinking*, Richard Kyle (1998) remarks that “religion no longer has the corner on eschatology” (167). In his book, Kyle focuses his attention on the trajectory of eschatological thinking throughout history. The author briefly surveys the end-times terminology, and shows how the word eschatology has been contemporarily reinvented and used in diverse areas of secular inquiry. One of the limitations of Kyle’s study is its failure to recognize that eschatology, as an expression of hope for and preoccupation with humankind’s *telos*, has also been applied in political philosophy and theory (Tinder 1965). This neglect is unfortunate since, as Watts suggests, teleological cogitations, which invariably transcend their common religious context, are manifestations of deeper individual and social concerns onto “the scientific or political arenas” (Watts 2000, 49).

However the relationship between eschatology and politics has not gone entirely unnoticed. A case in point is the interplay of these two elements in several approaches to Karl Marx’s work. Marx’s political arguments and historical perspective are,

according to some commentators, analogous to religious eschatological ideas (Avineri 1968; Löwith 1949; Tucker 1972).¹⁰² While an extensive assessment of historical materialism is not necessary to my purposes, such characterization of Marxism is an important reminder that teleology is not alien to Western political philosophy and theory.¹⁰³ Indeed, the eschatological character of Marxism suggests that such interest might have played a significant part in one of the most influential political philosophies of the last century. In his summary of Karl Löwith's critique of Marx's work, Turner underscores this point by concluding that

...Marx historical materialism was a secularized version of Christian teleology. Despite the scientific vocabulary of the Marxist vision of history, Löwith treats Marx's philosophy of history as a global vision that depends fundamentally on the Christian scheme of eschatology, the doctrine of the Last Days and the Restoration of man to Grace. (Löwith 1993, 15)

Authors more sympathetic to historical materialism forcefully argue against this approach to Marxism (Levine 1972; Fleischer 1973). Levine, for instance, believes that interpretations such as Löwith's are not constructive exercises in intellectual criticism. On the contrary, Levine complains that this type of classification of Marx's work is a "disservice to contemporary humanism" (Levine 1972, 281). Despite Levine's protests and disappointment, the categorization of Marxism as eschatological has been put forth systematically and it seems quite well established by now (Fergusson 1997; Cohn

¹⁰² Fleischer (1973) comments that "the works of K. Löwith, J. Hommes, R. Tucker and others have caused the view to be widely accepted that Marxism is basically a pseudomorphous religion doctrine of salvation, that historical materialism is really a historical Messianism, that it looks forward to a kind of eschatological redemption, that its attitude to the future is prophetic and that its mentality is that of faith, 'complete' faith in what is hoped for" (87).

¹⁰³ "The eschatological standpoint has been of central importance in the history of the Western spirit" (Tinder 1965, 312).

2001).¹⁰⁴ Hence, it is not surprising that Murray Rothbard (1990), in his article “Karl Marx: Communist as Religious Eschatologist,” emphatically remarks that an eschatological analysis of Marxism leads to the conclusion that: “in the same way as the return of the Messiah, in Christian theology, will put an end to history...so the establishment of communism will put an end to human history” by bringing forth “a secularized Kingdom of Heaven on earth” (123).

Whether one agrees with this assessment of historical materialism, what seems clear is that Marxism did not bring forth the “end of history,” and it ultimately failed to establish any kind of lasting Communist utopia (Walicki 1995). Nevertheless, from an ideological standpoint, the failure of Communism raised important questions regarding the vitality of competing political principles and their relevance for humankind’s future (Held 1996; Ceaser 2003). Some of these questions were addressed by Francis Fukuyama (1992; 1989) in his book, *The End of History and the Last Man*; and also in an earlier essay entitled “The End of History?”. I will discuss Fukuyama’s work later; it suffices to say here that the core of his hypothesis is that, at the conclusion of the Cold War, the world has possibly witnessed the fulfilled *telos* of humanity’s politico-ideological evolution with the “universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (Fukuyama 1989, 4). The universal acceptance of these political ideals represents, Fukuyama (1989) explains, the decisive triumph of the West through the “unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism” (3).

¹⁰⁴ Tucker (1972) also points out that “we now frequently read that Marxism is essentially a moralistic system, that it stands or falls as ethical, that *Capital* is a moral or even metaphysical treatise in economic disguise, that the Materialistic Conception of History is a form of eschatology, that Marxism is a religion of the age of industrialism, and so on” (13).

Fukuyama's conclusion that liberalism is the victor in the end-times struggle for ideological supremacy has attracted considerable controversy (Bloom 1989; Derrida 1994; Brown 1995). Despite the critics, Brown (1995) is not completely convinced that Fukuyama's arguments should be summarily dismissed, because they represent a valid attempt to deal with the unsettling point that "something rather basic and genuinely meaningful" has occurred in the final years of the twentieth century. In Brown's assessment, there are several vulnerabilities in the central thesis of *The End of History* but, in the end, Fukuyama's (1995) work deserves credit "for asking the right questions" at the right time (2).¹⁰⁵ These questions, however, have led commentators in unexpected directions. One of the paths trailed by some of Fukuyama's interlocutors is the eschatological one. Grenz and Franke (2001) point out, for instance, that "despite the post-modern incredulity concerning meta-narratives," Fukuyama's bold statement that "humanity's progressive historical trajectory has reached an end" constitutes "nothing less than 'a secularized version of Christian eschatology'" (240).

It is difficult to overlook the parallelism between Grenz and Franke's evaluation of Fukuyama's thesis, concerning the victory of liberalism, and the aforementioned eschatological nature of Marxism. Both approaches have been regarded as instances of secular eschatological thinking in relation to socio-political ideals. I believe this observation, in itself, represents a provocative rationale for the investigation of political liberalism from an eschatological standpoint. On the other hand, I suspect that some

¹⁰⁵ Manghani (2008) comments that "...the end of history thesis was widely disseminated, attracting serious academic attention as well as more playful popular commentary" (113).

might resist to such an unconventional analysis of a tradition that has sought “to provide a purely rational account of individual moral obligation that does not borrow authority from religious or cultural traditions” (Lutz 2004, 34-5). Nevertheless, those who might oppose a teleological evaluation of political liberalism, on the grounds that it is essentially a secular ideology, should bear in mind that, while eschatology is primarily associated with religious and theological views of humankind’s *telos*, such is not always the case. As explained in the Definition chapter of this work, the term eschatology can also be applied outside its traditional religious context. Simply put, eschatology as an expression of the projections, ideals and hopes for the future of humankind can be, and has been used, in diverse areas of secular thought.

Again, the eschatological terminology is not, and has not been, restricted to a set of religious concerns with the future. The term has also been widely used in areas of secular inquiry to encapsulate a broader range of expectations that can run from the cosmological to the political. For example, while the word eschatology can take on a religious connotation that presupposes the instrumentality of divine intervention in leading socio-political history towards a specific conclusion; it can, conversely, also embody the expectation for the achievement of a better intramundane socio-political order, through humankind’s own efforts. This latter meaning is particularly relevant when discussing the claims of some secular ideologies, such as the millenarian vision associated with the Contestado Rebellion in Brazil, or the end-times victory of political liberalism (Diacon 2002). In any case, eschatology, broadly understood, can be *either of a religious or secular nature, in which a decisive break with the present state of affairs*

is necessary in the hope that such a rupture is going to bring about changes that, ultimately, has as its telos a new world order which is marked by justice, peace and social-political stability.

The above definition preserves not only the religious aspect of the term, but it also allows for an eschatological analysis of liberalism without ignoring this ideology's essential secular nature. That said, it is my suggestion that, like several political movements, and ideologies - such as the French Revolution, diverse socio-political efforts of the twentieth century and even Communism - liberalism possesses its own eschatological outlook.¹⁰⁶ Keeping in mind McIntyre's (1988) statement that liberalism is a tradition, and like other traditions, it "has its set of texts and its disputes over their interpretation," and that it also "expresses itself socially through a particular kind of hierarchy," I would like to argue that, despite its secular character, liberalism has its own understanding of what should constitute humankind's *telos* (345). Hence, it is my contention that an analysis of liberalism, from an eschatological point of view, should not be ruled out as an aberration. On the contrary, such an approach may amount to a relevant and instructive, albeit non-conventional, way of addressing the most significant political tradition of the twentieth-first century.

Indeed, in his "Politics and Eschatology," Tinder (1965) has argued that eschatological perspectives provide "a vantage point which is essential for understanding man's collective situation" (312). This observation, made by Tinder more than forty

¹⁰⁶ Barkum (1974) argues that Nazism, Soviet and Chinese communisms "have all built great political systems" upon eschatological foundations (167).

years ago, becomes even more significant today, in a time of intense globalization. As it has the potential to become this century's predominant political ideology, liberalism may carry assumptions that are tainted with teleological views about human nature and society. These assumptions, more importantly, can conflict with religious eschatological beliefs. Thus, the essentially secular character of liberalism should not shield this political tradition from such an analysis, because this perspective not only allows for an alternative "vantage point" from which to discuss this ideology, but also because, as I will argue below, eschatological and teleological preoccupations have underlined the socio-political views of some important thinkers within this tradition.

Before proceeding with my discussion, three final comments are in order. First, it is not my purpose either to prove or defend the relevance, validity or even the accuracy of any liberal view dealt with in this chapter. It is beyond the scope of this work to engage in such a discussion. This observation is particularly relevant when considering Francis Fukuyama's work. I am not concerned to demonstrate, for instance, whether Fukuyama is correct in arguing for a universal human history, which has as one of its outcomes the endorsement of liberalism as the ultimate political ideology. The same observation applies to my discussion on Kant's and Mill's ideas of humankind, its destiny and progress. There is an abundance of critical assessments of these author's writings, if one desires to pursue other venues. My interest in these authors lies in their teleological assumptions and the place of those views within their respective political philosophies. In other words, this chapter is not the place to argue either in favor or against any given position; rather, its objective is to raise the possibility that, as is the

case with other traditions, liberalism advocates eschatological expectations which can, at times, conflict with the ones proposed by the religious groups already discussed.

Second, it is abundantly acknowledged among theorists that there are several variants and shapes of political liberalism (Held 1996). When it comes to the study of this political tradition, one is compelled to admit that any attempt to cover or exhaust all of its different nuances is a demigod's enterprise. I certainly do not propose such a Herculean task here. As was the case in the assessment of Christianity and Islam, there are several possible ways of approaching the interplay of eschatology and liberalism. Yet a certain focus was necessary then, and the same is required now, if this discussion is to remain a manageable task. Thus, my objective here is not to pursue an exhaustive eschatological investigation of all the aspects of liberalism. What I propose is the analysis of the ideas of some of this tradition's significant figures, as these ideas intersect with the question of teleology. Below I justify my selection of the liberal thinkers under consideration here. Still I realize that any single interpretation, such as the one put forth in the next paragraphs, of a tradition as complex as political liberalism will not satisfy everyone. While I understand such a concern, it should not prevent me from pursuing my goal of proposing a politico-eschatological analysis of some of the ideas of Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill and Francis Fukuyama.

A third and final observation is required concerning the choice of the aforementioned authors as the source of eschatological thinking within the liberal tradition. Briefly, the rationale for choosing Kant and Mill relies on these authors' foundational significance to liberalism. It is difficult to overstate the relevance of Kant

and Mill to political thought and liberalism, in particular. For instance, in Galston's (1993) assessment, the contemporary influence of Kant-inspired political philosophy is pervasive, John Rawls being "of course the chief representative of this tendency within liberal thought" (207). Concerning Mill, Gray (1983) once remarked that "if anyone has ever been a true liberal, it was John Stuart Mill" (117). Mill's liberal insights have found their way not only into political liberalism, but into social science, feminism, and several other areas of social inquiry as well (Devigne 2006). Also, Kant and Mill clearly engaged eschatological and teleological arguments as they developed their visions for humankind's future. As I will show later, eschatological concerns were not secondary to these authors; rather these preoccupations were part of their overall understanding of human nature, society and politics, which may imply that, at its foundation, liberalism, as a tradition, may be irrevocably connected to some type of teleology (Ceaser 2003).

Lastly, the inclusion of Francis Fukuyama, in this chapter, may raise some questions due to the controversial nature of his work. Yet the decision to discuss Fukuyama's views does not overlook the fact that his hypotheses were the object of criticism from many corners. Indeed, since the publication of his article, "The End of History?," Fukuyama's ideas have been put under scrutiny and, at some instances, closely evaluated and questioned (Burns 1994; Williams, Matthews and Sullivan 1997). While Fukuyama's arguments may not have convinced several of his interlocutors, his thesis that the *telos* of human ideological strife has arrived in the form of "a world-wide movement towards democratic or liberal forms of government" has really struck a chord (Kumar 1995, 206). As Fukuyama's ideas reverberated around the globe, they caught

the attention of Westerners and non-Westerners alike.¹⁰⁷ Fukuyama himself observed that, in the span of five years after the publication of his book *The End of History and the Last Man*, not a single week had passed without a comment or headline that included the expression “end of history” – as obvious references to the main theme of his work (Fukuyama 1995, 28).

Popularity, however, is not the main justification for addressing Fukuyama’s work here. The primary rationale is that, even in the midst of a barrage of criticisms, some commentators conceded that his central argument, “the current lack of competitors against political and economic liberalism in the world ideological market place, is surely hard to refute” (Mortimer 1989, 29).¹⁰⁸ Even more relevant is Ceaser’s claim that, in the final analysis, the substance of Fukuyama’s views concerning the end-times victory of liberalism not only made remarkable headway, but it also became “widely accepted” (Ceaser 2003, 55). For the purposes of this chapter, the intriguing aspect of this general acceptance of Fukuyama’s primary argument is that it sets the victory of Western liberal democracy within the context of a firm teleological vision for humankind. This vision has been described as a “bold eschatology,” which brings together the religious notion of the end of history and shapes it into a political theology, in an attempt to develop an apology of liberal democracy, “at the stage of its apparent global victory” (Scott 1999,

¹⁰⁷ Ceaser (2003) postulates that Fukuyama’s work was “one of the most widely disseminated and discussed academic articles of the twentieth century” (54).

¹⁰⁸ Manghani (2008) comments that, if taken from a certain perspective, “Fukuyama’s reading of history seemingly offers a very credible (if unsettling) critique of the period that sees the wholesome demise of communist rule across Eastern Europe” (113). It is in this regard that, as Held (1996) observes, Fukuyama’s writings is among the “key texts of our age” (281).

145).¹⁰⁹ As Mudge also points out, concerning liberalism's triumph and secular eschatology in Fukuyama,

[He]... gave us what... scholars would call a "realized eschatology," meaning an argument that the future is now, the reign of God, *has* come... He titled his book *The End of History*, meaning by this term that with the 1989 collapse of former Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall, and the seeming political victory of the West, a liberal democratic capitalist world order had come into being that put an end to history's bloody strivings after the meaning of social existence, an end to competition between visions of political and economic life, and the prospect of a forever stable mode of existence on this planet. (Mudge 2008, 283)

Several years have passed since the publication of "End of History?," yet there is still some debate surrounding Fukuyama's eschatological views about the final victory of political liberalism in the ideological marketplace. I do not intend to resolve this debate in the next paragraphs. My goal is the highlighting of the teleological underpinnings of Fukuyama's liberal thesis and to suggest that his views may not be completely at odds with some of those put forth by the other two liberal thinkers under consideration in this chapter.

Immanuel Kant: The Cure for Universal Evil

The suggestion that Fukuyama's main thesis embodies eschatological elements is certainly quite intriguing, but it is not unique. Some of the works by Immanuel Kant (1991; 1999), especially two of his most famous essays, *Idea of Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Purpose* and *Toward Perpetual Peace*, have been regarded as approaches to socio-political issues from a historico-teleological perspective. These approaches outline the practical implications of Kant's philosophy for "politics, history

¹⁰⁹ Cf. also Ahonen (2006, 34).

and the future of mankind” (O’Neill 2008, 529).¹¹⁰ Both *Idea* and *Perpetual Peace* express the Kantian vision concerning the possibility of an intramundane “millennium,” which he hoped would come to pass, in part, with the assistance of philosophical ideas (Kant 1991, 50). Granted, it may not be utterly unusual for someone like Kant to use end-times idiom in his writings since, as has been noted, the employment of chiliastic imagery was not uncommon in his time (Kant 1998, 219).

Nevertheless eschatological and teleological references in Kant’s work may carry more than a rhetorical nuance. Some commentators have considered these references as part of Kant’s overall vision for the future of humankind, and not simply a matter of linguistic expediency (Dickey 1987, 165-72).¹¹¹ Scherer (1995), for instance, refers to some arguments in *Perpetual Peace* as “mystifying eschatological notions,” which underline Kant’s “eschatological preoccupation with the way in which nature conspires or wills a purpose toward a state of perpetual peace” (437). Scherer is aware that Kant’s suggestion of a perennial peace is not necessarily a realizable expectation in the phenomenal world. Yet, as was the case with other Kantian views, such an idea, according to Scherer (1995), was ultimately possible within the “purposive providential designs of nature” (437).¹¹²

Concerning the evaluation of Kantian teleology, Jürgen Moltmann is even more incisive. Moltmann (1999) argues, for example, that some of Kant’s expectations for

¹¹⁰ Ellis (2005) notes that *Toward Perpetual Peace* is, for instance, one of his most influential works and “Kant’s most far-reaching exploration of the problems of the pragmatic application of ideal principles to imperfect political reality” (72).

¹¹¹ More than rhetoric, the eschatological language in Kant has been designated as “transcendental eschatology” which points to the “coming of man to himself” or the method of inward apocalypse” (Moltmann 1965, 45).

¹¹² Cf. also Kant (1959, 170).

humankind embody a powerful eschatological vision which should not be underestimated, since it has become a constitutive part of the “end-times paradigm” for the modern age (190).¹¹³ According to Moltmann (1999), Kant’s teleological views belong to the contemporary *progressive syndrome*, which has as its main characteristic the “millenarian belief in the progress of humanity and the perfectibility of history” (194). It is possible that, in his evaluation, Moltmann had in mind the following passage from one of Kant’s lectures, in which the philosopher suggests that

[t]he ultimate destiny of the human race is the greatest moral perfection, provided that it is achieved through human freedom, whereby alone man is capable of the greatest happiness... The end... for which man is destined is to achieve his fullest perfection through his own freedom... If we all so ordered our conduct that it should be in harmony with the universal end of mankind, the highest perfection would be attained. (Kant 1978, 252)

It is this hopeful vision of human moral progress and happiness that has led other commentators to argue that Kant’s ethico-teleological arguments, especially those proposing “the realization of a kingdom where peace and not war will characterize the relation between peoples and nations,” resemble, or even borrow from, eschatological ideas of a religious nature (Hauerwas 1981, 100). Yet what ultimately concerns Hauerwas (1981), for instance, is Kant’s ideal that the implementation of a kingdom of God on earth, through human action, is a possibility (100). Indeed, in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant (1960) pondered the realization of such a kingdom by suggesting that, albeit the debilitating consequences of radical evil, humankind is still capable of improvement and development.

¹¹³ Cf. also Wilkins (2007); Gaubatz (1996).

The problem of evil, as discussed at length by Kant in *Religion*, is portrayed as the major universal obstacle towards a socio-political millennium. Humankind's propensity to evil is what undermines the hope for "a state of perpetual peace based on the league of nations," and also turns the vision of a philosophical or theological millennium into a "wild fantasy" (Kant 1960, 30). Nevertheless, as Dickey (1987) has indicated, it is in *Religion* that Kant puts forth a clear "evolutionary eschatology," which starts with the concept of evil in human beings and concludes with the realization of the divine kingdom on earth. In the next paragraphs, I will focus my attention on Kant's discussion of the possible realization of the "kingdom of God on earth," as presented in *Religion*. As I approach Kant's "evolutionary eschatology," I bear in mind Palmquist's (1994) contention that "Kant's political philosophy cannot be fully understood unless we approach it through the spectacles of his philosophy of religion," especially as it has been expressed in *Religion* (422).

In *Religion*, through the observation of historical *signs* in human behavior and social interaction, Kant arrives at the conclusion that a "radical evil" has infected the species. This fallen human condition is one that affects every human being, even "the best among men" (Kant 1998, 27-8). Kant does not attempt to find metaphysical explanations or, for that matter, excuses concerning the evil principle acting within humanity (Kant 1998, 45, 90).¹¹⁴ On the contrary, it is his assessment that human beings themselves are responsible for their evil actions which, in a somewhat dark way, complements his project for human autonomy. If humans are autonomous moral beings,

¹¹⁴ Cf. also Allison (2002) for some relevant comments on this point.

it is only logical that their evil acts towards others are the product of their own free choices (Kant 1960, 36).¹¹⁵ The conclusion that follows is somewhat inescapable. As an individual is himself responsible for his actions, evil deeds included, he, “*himself*, must make or have made himself into whatever, in a moral sense, whether good or evil, he is or is to become” (Kant 1960, 40).

Yet, for Kant, this propensity to evil does not completely preclude human beings from acting morally, because they still have “an original predisposition to good,” and are able to assent to the moral law. Evil, nonetheless, has corrupted humankind’s ability to obey the moral law perfectly and spontaneously (Allison 2002, 342). Hence, this evil principle is radical because “it corrupts the ground of all maxims” (Kant 1960, 32). Once such a corruption takes place, evil “lies at the root of all particular” actions human beings perform (Wood 2000, 502).¹¹⁶ In probing the depths of radical evil, Kant suggests that it is impossible for humankind to get rid of such deeply-rooted inclination entirely. Kant thus concludes that evil is “*inextirpable* by human power,” being only possible for humanity to *overcome* it (Kant 1960, 32).

Despite arguing that radical evil is an innate and inextirpable propensity in human beings, Kant is careful not to suggest that such evil comes from our natural desires (Allison 2002, 339). According to Kant, these desires can be the source of vices, once they have been corrupted, but they are in themselves good in a negative fashion

¹¹⁵ Allison (2002) concludes that...“even though the dice may be loaded and make the result unavoidable, our adoption of the evil meta-maxim is still rightfully imputed to us. The adoption of this maxim, like its theological analogue, original sin, must be thought as resulting from an originary use of freedom” (343).

¹¹⁶ Even when one externally conforms to the moral law, the motivation underneath it may be an evil one (Giovanni 2005, 188; Michalson 1990, 30-51).

(they do not contradict the moral law) and in a positive manner, for these natural inclinations also work toward good (Kant 1960, 23).¹¹⁷ Kant recognizes three basic natural aspects in rational beings which are good in themselves, the predispositions to *animality*, *humanity*, and *personality* (Kant 1960, 21). Evil, again, is not to be found in any of these three basic natural predispositions in their original, uncorrupted state. Yet, once they have been tarnished by evil, especially in *animality and humanity*, one of the consequences is the tearing of the fabric of social harmony through

wild lawlessness (in relation to other men)... jealousy and rivalry... secret and open animosity against all whom we look upon as not belonging to us... the anxious endeavors of others to attain a hated superiority over us, to attain for ourselves as a measure of precaution and for the sake of safety such a position over others... envy, ingratitude, and spitefulness, etc (where they are simply the idea of a maximum of evil going beyond what is human), they can be called the *diabolical vices*. (Kant 1960, 22)¹¹⁸

Note that, in *Religion*, not only is Kant interested in how evil radically affects the individual, but he also shows considerable preoccupation in dealing with this propensity's effects on the interpersonal facet of human experience. After all, while human beings are autonomous, their journey towards moral perfection is not an isolated struggle towards an individualistic destiny. Granted, the propensity to evil implies that, from a moral perspective, the individual stands alone without anyone to blame for his

¹¹⁷ Kant points to several "gifts" bestowed to human beings that are in themselves good but that can "become extremely bad and mischievous" once they are practiced without a good will (1959, 9). Firestone and Jacobs (2008) also conclude that these predispositions are essentially good but "they can lead to corruption if misemployed" (135).

¹¹⁸ Kant does not suggest any specific cause for the origin of evil. Yet Anderson-Gold (1986) believes that the natural predisposition to *humanity* is the "most closely related to Kant's concept of evil" (26). Giovanni (2005), however, thinks that the source of evil cannot be identified with any of the three natural predispositions; rather, it is a product of an arbitrary choice which ultimately affects human beings' natural predispositions (186-94). Allison (2002) explains that Kant sees evil as "an active resistance to, or a turning away from, the moral law, which is precisely what makes it both imputable and evil" (338). Be that as it may, what is never in doubt is the clear social implication of universal radical evil.

shortcomings (Giovanni 2005, 192). Yet the result of an individual's actions is rarely limited to himself; they also have consequences in the form of social antagonism and the use of others as means towards individual goals. Ultimately, this understanding orients the propensity to evil towards the social realm, where such an inclination asserts itself by "withholding identification with the ends of others," which turns them into mere objects in the pursuing of personal ends (Anderson-Gold 1986, 27).

This *objectification* of other human beings, turning them into means to one's selfish interests and happiness, is in direct conflict with the categorical imperative. This certainly poses an interesting challenge to fallen human beings, who are supposed to act as if the human species were an end in itself and not a means towards selfish goals. Thus the concept of radical evil cannot be conceived as a trivial matter for Kant's account of social life and his overall proposal of moving humankind towards the path of moral perfection and reason (Giovanni 2005, 192). The suggestion that there is a propensity to evil - which expresses itself through selfish motives, competitive actions and the objectification of others - creates a considerable problem for Kant's articulation of the categorical imperative, since this imperative, by necessity, obligates all human wills (Kant 1959, 43). How does Kant propose to solve this impasse? His is a two-fold answer.

First, from an individual perspective, the solution for the problem of evil dwells in the individual himself. Granted, Kant recognizes the need for some type of help from "divine grace," yet he also makes quite clear that, as mentioned above, "man himself must make or have made himself into whatever, in a moral sense, whether good or evil,

he is or is to become” (Kant 1959, 40).¹¹⁹ In their autonomy, human beings are responsible for the good or bad they enact.¹²⁰ But evil lurks deep and Kant knows that it is quite difficult to bring good fruit from a bad tree (Kant, 1960, 40). There is no simple solution. A mere change in behavior will not do, since human beings are to become not only externally (legally) good, but the goal, instead, is the individual’s internal transformation into a morally upright being. In fact, what is required is a *revolution* in disposition, “a kind of rebirth, as it were a new creation...,” or a complete “change of heart” (Kant 1960, 43).

Kant is aware of the difficulty involved in this *rebirth*. How can an individual who is corrupted from “the very ground of its maxims” possibly aspire to a change of heart? Kant, however, does not allow for excuses or a feeble attitude. Duty requires such a transformation, and, in a Pelagian attitude, the philosopher insists that whatever duty requires, human beings, even children, must be able to deliver it (Kant 1960, 43).¹²¹ The process of achieving the stature of a moral individual is a long and arduous journey. But this path of moral improvement has to start with a decisive change in disposition which will be strengthened as the individual involved observes his improvements (Kant 1960, 62). Simply put, there is no possibility of salvation for human beings from radical

¹¹⁹ Kant’s suggestion of the need for “divine grace” is related to his understanding that the higher being knows the depths of the human heart (Kant 1960, 92). This does not mean however, that human beings are to sit idly waiting for a divine solution to their troubles. Human beings should also dedicate themselves to the solution of their own problems.

¹²⁰ Savage (1991) sums up this concept by affirming that “for Kant, moral evil, as well as moral worth, is imputable solely on the exercise of one’s personal freedom” (65).

¹²¹ As Michalson (1990) observes, “...radical evil does not absolve us of our obligation to make ourselves good again, meaning, among other things, that even a fallen freedom is still freedom” (7).

evil without a revolutionary “change of heart” towards a good and moral disposition (Kant 1960, 78).

More, however, is required. Kant’s second approach, in searching for a solution to radical evil, takes the social route, because humankind’s trials towards moral transformation are not over by the achieving of individual rebirths. Even when one inclines the heart towards the good, she is still not free and remains exposed to the assaults of the evil principle through social interactions. Kant observes that the simple association of individuals, even if they are not men and women “sunk in evil,” is a powerful component in the corruption of the human heart. In social relations, the possibility of evil is undeniably real (Kant 1960, 85).¹²² Thus, while an individual’s changing of disposition is a necessary first step towards the moral goal, such individualistic achievement is not sufficient. The treatment of radical evil also needs to take a public and social form. The social realm needs to be addressed if a permanent transformation is to occur in humankind’s moral outlook (Rossi 2005, 73). As Kant argues,

If no means could be discovered for the forming of an alliance uniquely designed as a protection against this evil and for the furtherance of goodness in man – of a society, enduring, ever extending itself, aiming solely at the maintenance of morality, and counteracting evil with united forces – this association with others would keep man, however much, as a single individual, he may have done to throw off the sovereignty of evil, incessantly in danger of falling back under its dominion. As far as we can see, therefore, the sovereignty of the good principle is attainable, so far as men can work toward it, only through the establishment and spread of a *society* in accordance with, and for the sake of, the laws of virtue,

¹²² Wood (2000) explicates that “evil for Kant is therefore a product of human reason under the natural conditions of its full development, which are found in the social condition. The radical evil in human nature is an inevitable accompaniment of the development of our rational faculties in society” (504).

a society whose task and duty is rationally to impress these laws in all their scope upon the entire human race. (Kant 1960, 86)

Hence, for Kant, the achievement of moral victory over evil starts with the individual but it cannot be attained individually. Moral perfection requires a systemic solution.¹²³ Consequently, in Book III of *Religion*, Kant suggests that there is, in the pursuit of moral perfection, a *sui generis* duty weighing upon individuals towards the species.¹²⁴ This duty implies that fallen human beings, for their own sake and of others, need to promote “the highest as a social good” (Kant 1960, 89).¹²⁵ While a preoccupation with personal moral development cannot be neglected as a necessary condition towards victory over radical evil, this victory can only be fully reached and sustained in the social and public realms. Hauerwas (1981) sums up the philosopher’s social concern by suggesting that “Kant’s account of morality is the metaphor of the life of the individual and also of that of the human race as a journey towards a goal...” (298). Indeed, Kant (1959), in *Foundations*, had already suggested the importance of specific social interactions in the form of a community, the “realm of ends,” as a significant vehicle for the moral development of human beings (Kant 1959, 51-2).

In *Religion* such a community is referred to as the “ethical commonwealth,” “the ethical state,” or “the kingdom of virtue.” By joining the ethical commonwealth, human beings are able to fend against the constant attacks of the evil principle and they can

¹²³ “Kant thinks that if we imagine the struggle against evil individualistically, in the form of isolated individuals each struggling heroically against his own inclinations and his own propensity to evil, then we are only concocting a recipe for the ignominious defeat of morality” (Wood 2000, 504).

¹²⁴ For a discussion regarding the preeminence of community and its significance for Kant’s categorical imperative, see Michalson (1990).

¹²⁵ Cf. also Wood (2000, 505).

finally remedy their state of “inner immorality” (Kant 1960, 89).¹²⁶ The ethical commonwealth, for Kant, is a vital element in his solution to universal evil and, consequently, the achievement of the *summum bonum* as a social good. Moral perfection, at this point, is not a question of individual striving, but a social good which should be pursued by the entire human race within a commonwealth of moral virtue (Kant 1960, 86). As Rossi explains,

[t]he end point of the moral journey of humanity... is thus the moral union of persons in an ethical commonwealth... Kant’s coordination of the ethical commonwealth to the attainment of the highest good as a social goal pushes the boundaries of the religious question of salvation and damnation beyond a concern with the destiny of the individual. It also pushes the boundaries of the moral question of individual responsibility that had been such a focus of previous discussions. (Rossi 2005, 74)

The highest good, as a social good, is clearly represented in Kant’s articulation of the ethical commonwealth. This commonwealth is humankind’s best hope for a conclusive victory over evil. In this regard, humanity’s *telos* should be more than an aggregation of individualistic moral achievements; rather it must be a social goal, if radical evil is to be overcome. In addition, the strife towards the highest good, as a social objective, is more than a simple heartfelt expectation, but a “necessary or obligatory end,” which is so closely associated with the Kantian moral law “that he believes that if the highest good is not possible, the moral law itself is called into question” (Moore 1992, 55).¹²⁷ Simply put, for Kant, as far as moral perfectibility and the overcoming of radical evil are concerned, life in society is essential. Therefore, as a

¹²⁶ Also Quinn (2000, 257).

¹²⁷ Moore (1992) suggests that “we can reject the possibility of a universal ethical community – but only at the price of rejecting Kant’s entire ethical vision” (66).

social good, the realization of the ethical commonwealth is intrinsically associated with Kant's teleological vision for humankind. Kant equates the realization of this commonwealth with the implementation of God's kingdom on earth that will lead, ultimately, to eternal peace.¹²⁸ As Kant himself argues,

We have good reason to say...that "the kingdom of God is come unto us" once the principle of the gradual transition...to a (divine) ethical state on earth, has become general and has also gained somewhere a *public* foothold, even though the actual establishment of this state is still infinitely removed from us. For since this principle contains the basis for a continual approach towards such a consummation, there lies in it (invisibly), as in a seed which is self-developing and in due time self-fertilizing, the whole, which one day is to illumine and to rule the world...The obstacles, arising from political and civil causes, which may from time to time hinder their spread, serve rather to make all the closer the union of men's spirits with the good (which never leaves their thoughts after they have once cast their eyes upon it). Such, therefore, is the activity of the good principle, unnoted by human eyes but ever continuing - erecting for itself in the human race, regarded as a commonwealth under laws of virtue, a power and kingdom which sustains the victory over evil and, under its own dominion, assures the world of an eternal peace. (Kant 1960, 114)

If life in society is fundamental in combating the evil principle, what is not altogether clear, in Kant's conception of the ethical commonwealth, is the concrete social means by which such a vision will take place (Rossi 2005, 103). At one point, he suggests that the ethical commonwealth is similar to a family, but Kant does not develop the idea fully (Kant 1960, 93). Be that as it may, the household structure cannot ultimately fulfill this commonwealth's purpose since it is an arrangement that requires a certain level of coercion, which is something that cannot coexist with the ethical state.

Kant also compares the ethical commonwealth with the church, which, according to

¹²⁸ Michalson (1999) argues that one of the important developments in *Religion* "is the apparent superseding of the postulate of immortality by the theory of the moral progress associated with the ethical community" (121). Also Markus (2004).

some commentators, opens the possibility for the ecclesiological interpretation of the ethical state (Quinn 2000; Palmquist 1994). Undoubtedly, there are insightful comments in Kant's discussion concerning the nature of the ethical commonwealth in regards to his understanding of the church.¹²⁹ Kant, however, leaves little doubt that the commonwealth that he envisions is not based on any ecclesiastical institution or structure. The commonwealth resembles a church in the sense of being a community of morally righteous people, a "people of God," and a "representative of a city of God," but the commonwealth is not circumscribed by the institutional church (Kant 1960, 93). The "church" that Kant compares to the ethical commonwealth is "a purely moral entity, devoid of historical or ecclesiastical elements" (Moore 1992, 66).

The final suggestion of a possible, concrete basis for the implementation of Kant's teleological vision is the political realm. The political commonwealth is an important intermediate and tangible platform towards humanity's moral destiny.¹³⁰ There are, at least, two suggestive allusions to the political realm which point to its relevance concerning the moral progress of humanity and the establishing of God's kingdom on earth. The first allusion to politics in *Religion*, within the context of the establishment of the ethical commonwealth, is related to Kant's above stated proposition that the process of establishing the ethical state, which takes shape gradually but constantly, is marked by "obstacles, arising from political and civil causes." Such "obstacles" represent a significant impediment towards the social good. However, those

¹²⁹ Kant (1960), for instance says that the ethical commonwealth "can be thought of as a people under divine commands, *i.e.*, as a *people of God*..." (91).

¹³⁰ Anderson-Gold (1986) believes that the moral order associated with the ethical commonwealth is a significant element in bridging "gaps in Kant's political philosophy" (31).

obstacles will ultimately “serve... to make all the closer the union of men's spirits” leading to the erecting of “a commonwealth under laws of virtue, a power and kingdom which sustains the victory over evil and, under its own dominion, assures the world of an eternal peace.” The suggestion that political and social struggles have as their outcome an even “closer union of men’s spirits” seems to point to the Kantian notion of “unsocial sociability, as discussed in *Idea*” (Kant 1991, 44).

For Kant, “unsocial sociability” characterizes the continual coming together of human beings in society, despite their selfish resistance to cooperate. In this Kantian notion of human antagonism, there is a constant threat to the structure of social relations. Yet, according to Kant, it is this antagonistic threat to society which is used by nature to help human beings in their process of reaching their moral and rational end. In other words, socio-relational tension is the means through which the development of humankind is finally accomplished. While Kant does not explicate this idea in more detail in *Religion*, in his considering of the formation of the ethical commonwealth, such, however, appears to be his suggestion concerning the role of “political obstacles.” If the logic of unsocial sociability is followed to its final implications, the aforementioned political setbacks may delay, momentarily, the *telos* of the highest social good and eternal peace. Yet, in the long run, the same political and civil antagonism, experienced by human beings, will work *for* the fulfillment of the *summum bonum* on earth, in the form of an ethical state and perpetual peace.

The second allusion to the realm of politics, as playing a part in the formation of the ethical state, is, again, only suggested and never fully developed in *Religion*.

According to Kant, there is a clear demarcation between the ethical and political commonwealths. The ethical state, for instance, is neither ruled by coercion nor by a political constitution. The ethical commonwealth is legislated internally through the laws of virtue (Kant 1960, 93). Despite their distinctive nature and legislative principles, it is significant that, for Kant, the realization of the ethical state *cannot* be completely disassociated from the political commonwealth since, as he explains, “unless it is based upon [the political] commonwealth, [the ethical commonwealth] can never be brought into existence by man” (Kant 1960, 86). How, then, should this reference to the relationship between the ethical and political commonwealths be understood?

It appears that, in their struggle to achieve the highest good, in the form of the ethical commonwealth, human beings must primarily act within the boundaries of the political realm. Granted, no externally legislated institution can achieve Kant’s goal of freeing humanity from the devastating social consequences of radical evil. On the other hand, human beings cannot have victory over evil, in the form of the ethical state, without basing their efforts on the political commonwealth. Politics is not only necessary but it constitutes a concrete condition, albeit a partial one, in the attainment of the species’ moral destiny. The ethical commonwealth is not to be conceived in a vacuum, but it is established, by human beings, on the basis of a legitimate political order. Interestingly, it is this practical importance of the political commonwealth, towards the highest good, that may partially explain Kant’s controversial position against political revolution. While the ethical state is not confined to the boundaries of the political realm, there is a synergistic relationship between the ethical and the political

commonwealths, which makes the destabilization of the political state, through the means of revolution, a condemnable act. As Atwell argues, if the ethical commonwealth “can only be established on the foundation of a political commonwealth, then political revolution must be forbidden – on strictly moral grounds” (Atwell 1986, 158).

Be that as it may, the point that cannot be overlooked in Kant’s vision concerning the coming of the kingdom of God on earth, through the idea of the ethical commonwealth, is the central role played by human beings in actively working towards it, even though it “is still infinitely removed from us.” Individual and social freedom may be distant but it cannot wait for an eschatological hope that is situated outside of history.¹³¹ For Kantian freedom and peace to take place, victory over universal evil has to be accomplished in this life. Hence the *sui generis* social obligation that rests upon humankind. Such an obligation outlines an eschatological expectation, a millenarian hope, which has, at a minimum, a moral force (Ellis 2000, 110).¹³² Yet, in Kant’s teleological vision,

[t]he idea that will “help” realize the millennium from “afar,” is the “ethical commonwealth,”... (i.e., the Kingdom of God on earth) that allows for the full expression of man’s moral personality. This millennium, moreover, which beckons from afar and promises hope for a better future, is inextricably tied up in Kant’s mind with the idea of holiness [moral virtue]. From that idea man borrows motives for the kind of ethical action in the present that will be

¹³¹ In Religion, Kant “wants human autonomy to take over the role traditionally played by divine action in the creation of a good universe, with corresponding displacement of the supernatural world by the noumenal realm where Kantian freedom enjoys its possibility” (Michalson 1990, 8).

¹³² “An idea, according to the first *Critique*, is a spontaneous projection of pure reason, a projection to which nothing in experience – nothing that is empirical knowable – can be adequate, and yet which is for all that no mere chimera or fantasy. More specifically, a Kantian ‘idea’ is not an intuition to be contemplated (in which case the charge of fantasy would stick) but a goal to be systematically and progressively approached” (Shell 1996, 163). Moore (1992) also contends that “...it is still fair to ask whether Kant is truly interested in *bringing about* the ethical community. Does he see it as a real human possibility? The answer to this question is a qualified ‘yes’” (63).

necessary to overcome the obstacles “civilization” has placed in the way of the realization of his moral personality (Dickey 1987, 169).

Kant’s “chiliastic expectations,” which have as their goal the highest good as a social good, are neither religious nor mystical; instead they are moral and secular in essence.¹³³ Such “rational hope” is not based on theological affirmations or predictions concerning a divine scheme for the end-times (Michalson 1979, 150-52). On the contrary, despite Kant’s spiritual language in *Religion*, the historical realization of the *summum bonum* in the world, as the effective means of combating the evil principle, is not achieved by any Divine Being but, ultimately, by humanity itself.¹³⁴ The future of the species rests in the hands of human beings as they strive to build the kingdom of God on earth. This cosmopolitan realm, or world-community, which gradually takes shape and becomes a place where morality is not externally imposed but it is internally sustained, is the place where human beings are, through their own efforts, finally free.¹³⁵ More importantly, in this end-times realm, people are not treated as objects or even as means to the happiness of others, rather they are ends in themselves. Thus, when the ethical commonwealth arrives, Kant’s ethico-teleological vision for mankind will finally take place, because, in this commonwealth, the evil principle will be overcome, and, in

¹³³ “Here a kingdom of God is represented not according to a particular covenant (*i.e.*, not Messianic) but *moral* (knowable through unassisted reason)” (Kant 1960, 126).

¹³⁴ God may be the guarantor of human success but ultimately human beings must be seen as a “new kind of *demiurgos*, who creates a moral world within the given world, thus translating the ‘final end of creation itself’...from potentiality to actuality” (Yovel 1986, 91).

¹³⁵ Markus (2004) suggests that Kant’s ethical commonwealth takes a secularized form in *Perpetual Peace* as “the peaceful world federation of all states, each with a republican constitution – the great formulation of the ideas of an enlightened liberalism” (96-7).

it, the ends which their members pursue “will always be ends that are compatible with those of others” (Moore 1992, 60).¹³⁶

John Stuart Mill: Bringing Heaven to Earth

Much of the religious and theological language which appears in Kant’s work can be attributed to the influence of his Pietistic upbringing. The same, however, cannot be said about the next liberal thinker discussed in this chapter. John Stuart Mill, by his own admission, had essentially no religious exposure or catechetical instruction as he was growing up. Indeed, in his *Autobiography*, Mill’s (1981) asserts that, contrary to most of his fellow citizens, he was “one of the very few examples...of one who has not thrown off religious beliefs, but never had it” (Mill 1981, 45).¹³⁷ Notwithstanding the simplicity of Mill’s statement, which is possibly one of the most cited passages concerning his religiosity, it shrouds a relationship with religion that is far more complex than it appears at first (Cowling 1963; Raeder 2002).

Recent discussions on Mill’s interaction with religion have tried to address such a complexity within the context of his work (Raeder 2002; Daglier and Schneider 2007). Unfortunately, many of these assessments of Mill’s religiosity, or lack thereof, make

¹³⁶ Moore (1992) also comments that “in the *Groundwork* Kant states explicitly that the ethical community is ‘only an ideal.’ It is a goal that is beyond the power of any single moral agent. In the *Second Critique*, he seems to regard it as a purely eschatological possibility. That the ethical community is an ideal, however, does not mean that it has *only* normative or regulative significance. In his later works, Kant places an increasing emphasis on the ethical community and makes clear that he is genuinely interested in bringing it about in the actual world. It becomes a state of affairs which not only ought to exist, or which could exist under certain conditions, but which can exist” (63).

¹³⁷ Mill believed that “[t]his isolation from religious training allowed him to analyze religion, including Christianity, as an anthropologist in an alien culture might do, recognizing its importance to others and its powerful influence on all aspects of society and politics, without, however, having any personal involvement with it” (Hamburger 1991, 152).

only brief references to eschatology and its importance to his overall political and social concerns. Such neglect seems hardly justifiable, since his posthumous *Three Essays in Religion* is dotted with eschatological references, and even includes a section on immortality. Eschatological themes are also present in Mill's other works such as *Utilitarianism*, where the teleological thematic is part of his defense of the Religion of Humanity, also known as the Religion of the Future.¹³⁸ In this chapter, I will approach some of Mill's views concerning eschatology as it intersects with his socio-political project.

From the outset, it is significant to ascertain that, for all his criticism and incredulity regarding religiosity in his lifetime, Mill does not perceive religion as futile or irrelevant to the development of human society. As I will discuss later, the relevance of religion, for Mill, becomes evident in the context of his interest in the Religion of Humanity. For now, it suffices to say that, in his *Utility of Religion*, he concedes the usefulness of religion in the development of a civic character in many countries throughout the ages (Mill 1963, 405). This usefulness and power associated with religion are essentially centered on the teaching of morality.¹³⁹ As Mill explains,

[t]o speak first, then, of religious beliefs as an instrument of social good. We must commence by drawing a distinction most commonly overlooked. It is usual to credit religions as *such* with the whole of the power inherent in any system of moral duties inculcated by education and enforced by opinion. Undoubtedly mankind would be in a deplorable state if no principles or precepts of justice, veracity, beneficence, were taught publicly or privately, and if these virtues were not encouraged, and the opposite vices repressed, by the praise or blame, the favorable and unfavorable sentiments, of mankind. And since nearly everything of this sort which does take place, takes place in the name of religion; since

¹³⁸ "...Mill advocated the Religion of Humanity to the end of his days" (Sell 2004, 81).

¹³⁹ Mill also realizes the power that religion could exert over the human beings' feeling (Sell 2004).

almost all who are taught any morality whatever, have it taught to them as religion...and religion receives the credit of all the influence in human affairs which belongs to any generally accepted system of rules for the guidance and government of human life. (Mill 1963, 407)

If Mill is ready to admit to the utility of religion as a means to inculcate morality, he is less accommodating to religious supernatural beliefs. Indeed, Mill shows considerable preoccupation with religious emphasis on transcendental doctrines. This concern leads him to consider, for instance, the subject of immortality from an objective perspective. Mill's overall conclusion concerning the actuality of an immortal soul is that there is neither concrete evidence against it, nor any in favor of such possibility. Mill observes that, for some, a person's emotional attributes, thoughts, and feelings amount to proof in favor of an immortal substance, known as the human soul. He disagrees with such simplistic reasoning. The existence of mental functions does not have to lead to metaphysical speculations about the possible presence of an immortal component in human beings (Mill 1963, 461). In the end, however, Mill admits that science has little to say, at least conclusively, on the subject. Hence, while Mill has deep doubts concerning immortality, he maintains an agnostic position on the subject, by arguing that it is quite difficult to prove or disprove the existence of an everlasting soul. It is Mill's final assessment that the issue of immortality

is one of those very rare cases in which there is really a total absence of evidence on either side, and in which the absence of evidence for the affirmative does not, as in so many cases it does, create a strong presumption in favor of the negative. (Mill 1963, 463)

Mill's agnosticism concerning immortality, however, should not be understood as indifference to eschatological issues. On the contrary, in several instances, Mill went

on the offensive and attacked these beliefs. In *On Liberty*, for example, Mill (1977) severely criticizes Christianity, particularly concerning its eschatological teachings on the after-life. Note that the essence of Mill's criticism here is not regarding the untruthfulness or the implausibility of such faith. His condemnation is centered on the conviction that, invariably, the Christian notion of immortality promotes a selfish attitude which has damaging ramifications for the social realm. By advocating faith in an immortal soul and "the hope of heaven and the threat of hell, as the appointed and appropriate motives to a virtuous life," Christianity failed "far below the best of the ancients" in laying down a wholesome basis for morality (Mill 1977, 255). The belief in immortality, and the possibility of life either in heaven or hell, encourages an unhealthy outlook towards the present life by suggesting that a believer's primary, and ultimate concern, is with his own eternal destiny.

Despite Mill's acceptance of the overall utility of religion for social morality, he sees religious eschatological beliefs as essentially immoral. The prospect of an eternal existence in heaven, or hell, tends to corrupt an individual's character by fixing his thoughts on his own posthumous destiny, if such indeed exists. In Mill's final analysis, the eschatological fixation with a possible life outside this world is immoral because it turns a person's own intramundane existence and, for that matter, all human beings, simply into means to a private, individualistic salvation outside history. Mill is unequivocal in his opinion that the transcendental teaching on the expectation of possible rewards, or punishments, turns out to be "one of the most serious obstacles to the great purpose of moral culture, the strengthening of the unselfish and weakening of

the selfish element in our nature...” (Mill 1963, 422). Simply put, the concern with one’s own extramundane destiny is fundamentally detrimental to the overall socio-political well-being of the human race because this preoccupation is a “vulgar” religious doctrine, which is based on coarse and grotesque selfishness (Daglier and Schneider 2007, 581).

Selfishness is not a minor issue on Mill’s account of human development.¹⁴⁰ He points to two fundamental problems associated with believers’ selfish concern with the future. First, such an individualistic and egotistical mindset is detrimental to human civilized society which, by necessity, requires from its members a certain level of cooperation, instead of “each person [shifting] for himself” – as was the case with savage peoples (Mill 1977, 120). For Mill, the clinging to religious eschatological expectations reveals the prevalence of an uncivilized outlook, preoccupied with irrational, immature and selfish hope.¹⁴¹ Second, religious beliefs in the after-life have, ultimately, an alienating effect on the individual by promoting the notion of an ideal good life disconnected with the present existence. As Mill explains, in hoping to “find the good which he has failed to find on earth, or the better which is suggested to him by the good which on earth he has partially seen and known,” the individual divorces himself from his duty of ameliorating the conditions in this world (Mill 1963, 419). As Mill sees it, the miseries and difficulties of this life, when looked from an eschatological

¹⁴⁰ Raeder refers to this issue in Mill as the “sin of selfishness” (Raeder 2002, 297).

¹⁴¹ “There is ...no assurance whatever of a life after death...But to any one who feels it conducive either to his satisfaction or to his usefulness to hope for a future state as a possibility, there is no hindrance to his indulging that hope” (Mill 1963, 466). Fear, being that of everlasting punishment or of God is not only unnecessary but a savage attitude as well (Mill 1963, 417-8; Mill 1988, 244, 246n).

perspective, take the individual in an egotistic and alienating search to fulfill his dreams in the life to come, in heaven, which is profoundly detrimental to the improvement of this world's socio-political conditions.

Hence, Mill's arguments against transcendental eschatology outline the existence of a substantial paradox within traditional religion, particularly Christianity. This inconsistency becomes clear when contrasting the fundamental function of religion, as the promoter of a healthy social and civic morality, with its own teachings on transcendental eschatology, which, according to Mill, is an incentive to a selfish, therefore immoral, notion of upright living. In other words, by using this life and people as means to an individualistic eternal bliss - and by ignoring the evil and suffering in this present existence, in expectation of a better life outside this world - religion becomes ineffective as a moral teacher. What traditional religion gives with one hand, it takes away with the other. In Mill's judgment, a substantive solution is necessary to solve the moral distortion created by extramundane eschatological expectations. Mill proposes an alternative religious view, a belief system which may supply the appropriate feelings and attitudes to support the pursuit of intramundane moral goals. Indeed, Mill's answer to the paradoxical character of supernatural religion is a "real, but purely human religion," the Religion of Humanity (Mill 1963, 488). This solution is a very ambitious one, but one that reveals Mill's teleological vision for humanity, in its journey to achieve happiness and the species' *summum bonum*, within the boundaries of this world.

The Religion of Humanity, of course, is not Mill's creation. Mill borrows this concept from the Positivist philosophical system of Auguste Comte. Comte, himself,

was not the precursor of this religion but, undoubtedly, he was one of its most significant expositors (Wernick 2001, 23). His writings were also the source of inspiration for Mill's own humanistic religious views, notwithstanding considerable differences between these two men on the subject (Devigne 2006).¹⁴² One aspect that Mill shares with Comte is the hope that the Religion of Humanity could have an impact on the social, political and moral improvement of humankind. In a note from his diary Mill confesses that

[t]he best, indeed the only good thing (details excepted) in Comte's second treatise, is the thoroughness with which he has enforced and illustrated the possibility of making *le culte de l'humanité* perform the functions and supply the place of a religion. If we suppose cultivated to the highest point the sentiments of fraternity with all our fellow beings, past, present, and to come, of veneration for those past and present who have deserved it, and devotion to the good of those to come; universal moral education making the happiness and dignity of this collective body the central point to which all things are to trend and by which all are to be estimated, instead of the pleasure of an unseen and merely imaginary Power; the imagination at the same time being fed from youth with representations of all noble things felt and acted heretofore, and with ideal conceptions of still greater to come: there is no worthy office of a religion which this system of cultivation does not seem adequate to fulfill. It would suffice both to alleviate and to guide human life. Now this is merely supposing that the religion of humanity obtained as firm a hold on mankind, and as great a power of shaping their usages, their institutions, and their education, as other religions have in many cases possessed. (Mill 1988, 646)

The Religion of Humanity, for Mill, means the "cultivation of a high conception of what [our earthly] life may be made" (Mill 1963, 420-21). This conception transcends any individual concern, and it points to a common duty to be fulfilled in cooperation with other fellow human beings (Vernon 1989, 168). Essential to Mill, at this point in his reasoning, is the rejection of any speculation about the "imaginary and

¹⁴² Mill believed that "the Religion of Humanity, devoid of the authoritarian trappings that had been superadded to it by Comte, was the highest religion..." (Megill 1972, 616).

the unseen.” Indeed, this is one of the great potentials of the Religion of Humanity, the replacing of beliefs in the invisible and intangible with a higher concept of life centered on this earthly existence. In this regard, the *culte de l’humanité* is relevant for Mill because, contrary to traditional religion, it dislocates the focus from extramundane aspirations to “sentiments of fraternity with all our fellow beings, past, present, and to come.” This shift also promotes the “pursuit of truth, and the general good” of society, which is badly lacking in supernatural religion (Mill 1963 404).¹⁴³

In this regard, it is Mill’s belief that, if the Religion of Humanity were to guide social interactions, much progress, indeed, could be achieved. Mill’s rationale at this point is simple. He argues that the social benefit accomplished by supernatural religion is not due to the “intrinsic force” of its beliefs. Instead, supernatural religion’s influence is acquired by its privileged position in enforcing morality through means of authority, education and public opinion. If, then, Religion of Humanity were to assume the control of these tools, it could accomplish the same feat as transcendental religion. Mill shows considerable hope in this respect, especially by observing that the “spell” and power of supernatural religion had been slowly dissipating, which could represent a significant opportunity to the Religion of Humanity. Interestingly, as an example of this demise, Mill turns, again, to the issue of eschatology. According to Mill, the threat of a possible eschatological judgment was becoming rather ineffective as an incentive to morality. First, it was not persuasive in the face of real, temporal temptation. Earthly enticements

¹⁴³ One should not merely look for the truth that Mill’s religion might contain, since his interest, ultimately, is with the purposes this religion might serve. After all, Mill’s creed was utilitarianism (Sell 2004).

were simply too tangible, in light of an unseen future in heaven or hell. Second, the suggestion of punishments after death was not promoting morality because, in general, individuals had developed indulgent views of their own actions. Such a lenient attitude towards one's own moral shortcomings attenuated considerably the fear of spending eternity in Hades (Mill 1963, 413).

Despite the decline of transcendental religion, and the exciting moral possibilities of his Religion of Humanity, Mill understands that the new faith is left with one significant disadvantage, one that Mill, ironically, despises in transcendental religion. His humanistic faith lacks an eschatological outlook. The Religion of Humanity's complete focus on human earthly life presents Mill with a conundrum. Human existence, within the confines of this world, is simply too brief to fulfill all the desires and hopes to which human beings aspire. In his own assessment, Mill acknowledges the impossibility of inserting the totality of elevated feelings and moral accomplishments, which are required by the individual in his pursuit of happiness, in the "short duration, the smallness and insignificance" of the present existence. Mill's solution to this difficulty aligns itself perfectly with his humanistic views. Mill suggests that the real future of humankind is based not on the individual and his accomplishments, but *in* and *by* the human species, as a whole. If the span of an individual's life is constricted, "the life of the species is not short; its indefinite duration is practically equivalent to endlessness" (Mill 1963, 420). At this point in the argument, Mill's teleological vision for humankind starts to take shape. This is particularly true as the species' endless duration of earthly life is combined with his understanding of the unlimited human

“capability for improvement” (Mill 1963, 420). The combining of these two elements shapes the Millian intramundane eschatology into a vision powerful enough to dispense with the need for a future life outside this world (Mill 1963, 422).

Mill’s humanistic eschatology is neither accidental nor irrelevant for the socio-political objectives embedded in the Religion of Humanity. On the contrary, the question of humankind’s ultimate purpose or *telos* is something that Mill could not dispense with, if his utilitarian and humanistic vision is to be implemented successfully (Hamburger 1991, 163).¹⁴⁴ The shift from an eschatological emphasis, based on rewards and punishments within an ethereal reality, to a more concrete realizable future in this present existence, has a two-fold importance for Mill’s project. First, it deals with his apprehension concerning the negative implications of supernatural eschatological beliefs. As argued earlier, Mill perceives traditional religious teaching on the after-life as promoting a selfish and immoral mindset. The corrupting concept of moral virtue instilled by fear of eternal punishment, or desire for heavenly rewards, can, finally, be eliminated. Mill accomplishes this victory by associating the pursuit of a better concept of life, and moral integrity, with the veneration of a new, concrete, and tangible object: the human species (Devigne 1998).

The veneration of humanity, which is central in Mill’s religion, is much more than a simple feeling of obligation to fellow human beings; it is, in fact, akin to a new religious doctrine.¹⁴⁵ This doctrinal statement posits that the “strong and earnest”

¹⁴⁴ Cf. also Megill (1972).

¹⁴⁵ As Mill (1963) explicates, these sentiments “...are a real religion...The essence of religion is the strong and earnest direction of the emotions and desires towards an ideal object, recognized as of the highest excellence, and as rightfully paramount over all selfish objects of desire. This condition is fulfilled by the

emotions of an individual are redirected from the preoccupation with eternity to the proper object of contemplation and hope, the human species and its earthly well-being (Mill 1963, 422). By shifting the focus to earth, through the elevation of humanity, Mill's religion overcomes the problem of the immoral individualistic desire for salvation in the life to come, which is, according to Mill, a "radical inferiority" of transcendental religion. This understanding reinforces Mill's belief that his religion is essentially a fair-minded and altruistic one, which sets before the individual an object of veneration that can be "loved and pursued as an end for its own sake" (Mill 1963, 422).¹⁴⁶ As Raeder puts it, in the end, the Religion of Humanity creates a new religious people, who

...will feel one another's interest as their own interests. They will not only become more cooperative but even capable of 'proposing themselves a collective, not an individual interest as the aim... for their actions...' The towering heights of Mill's religious ambitions could not become more clear. The New religion of the Future...is certain, he believes, to achieve a greater ascendancy over 'all thought, feeling, and action' than any religion to which human beings have previously adhered (Raeder 2002, 402).

Second, Mill's understanding that the life of the species on earth is endless sets the ideal existential background for his eschatological vision of progress and perfectibility of humankind.¹⁴⁷ In this sense, Mill's position can be characterized as a

Religion of Humanity in as eminent degree, and as high a sense, as by the supernatural religions even in their best manifestations, and far more so than in any of their others" (422).

¹⁴⁶ Mill's goal is "to establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole" (Mill 1963, 218). In this regard, Tetlow (2007) has suggested that Mill's Religion of Humanity can be qualified as Kantian for it is based on the welfare of human beings for their own sake.

¹⁴⁷ Mill's association with Comte *via* the Religion of Humanity implies that, as Comte, "Mill's view rests on a certain level of man's perfectibility" (Tetlow 2007, 5). Regarding Comte's vision for the future, which might have influenced Mill's eschatological perspective, "the coincidence of individual and collective perfection in the formation of a social body harmonized by love occurs only at the end of a long history. Nevertheless, this *summum bonum* is more than a regulative ideal, because, as in other grand narratives of progress, it finally *does* arrive, making visible, indeed, the logic of the process that had propelled it into being" (Wernick 2001, 153). Cf. also Mehta (1999) and Sullivan (1983).

“theology of man’s progress,” in which human moral, social and political *telos* is guaranteed through the species’ unlimited potential for advancement, or as he argues, an “indefinite capability for improvement” (Mill 1963, 420).¹⁴⁸ Mill’s expectations, for his Religion of the Future, purport a vision of development towards moral perfection and happiness that is sustained by its members’ infinite competence to improve themselves and, consequently, the species.¹⁴⁹ Note that, in Mill’s eschatological perspective, the importance of the individual is not disregarded. On the contrary, a person’s contribution, when added to that of his fellow human beings, has a significant impact in the cosmic struggle towards the elimination of suffering and the improvement of life on this earth. As Mill explains,

A virtuous human being assumes in this theory the exalted character of a fellow-labourer with the Highest, a fellow-combatant in the great strife; contributing his little, which by the aggregation of many like himself becomes much, towards that progressive ascendancy, and ultimately complete triumph of good over evil, which history points to... (Mill 1963, 425)¹⁵⁰

The Millian eschatological concept of progress and perfection is essentially historical and intramundane. In his vision, the faster human beings concentrate on the species’ earthly future, the sooner they will fulfill the “dream of the indefinite improvement of the human race” and the final goal of creating the hope for heaven in

¹⁴⁸ See also Mill (1977, 22); Tetlow (2007).

¹⁴⁹ “...the fulfillment each person will achieve through bearing his part, however small, in perfecting the society of the future, in helping to realize the final end of temporal human suffering and effort – implicitly refer to the Religion of Humanity” (Raeder 2002, 300). Devigne (2006) argues that “...a new religion, a Religion of Humanity must look to the seemingly endless character of the species, as well as humanity’s inexorable drive for improvement...” (144).

¹⁵⁰ This idea of human beings working with the Deity to promote human happiness seems much more a concession on Mill’s part to those who were still tied to a supernatural conception of religion. But, overall Mill had very little use for the idea of a Deity, for “...god was unable to create a very good world, leaving it to humanity to push this task forward” (Devigne 2006, 148).

this life (Raeder 2002, 133). As human beings' actions, through political and social means, move the species towards progress, life on earth will become substantively better. Conversely, the "baseless" expectation for a future existence outside this world will become less attractive. Thus, it is Mill's hope that, when the individual develops his sovereignty, in its fullness, and contributes with others, this life will become the *locus* of a paradisiacal existence. Only then will humankind find freedom from the need of "a future existence as a consolation for the sufferings of the present," because, according to Mill, the human species can do "perfectly well without the belief of a heaven" (Mill 1963, 426-27).¹⁵¹

Francis Fukuyama: The Liberal End of History

As stated above, the aim of this chapter is to argue that the liberal tradition has an underlining eschatological aspect embedded in its vision for humanity's socio-political aspirations. So far, I attempted to show that Kant and Mill had put forth secular eschatological visions, as they outlined their own possible alternatives for humankind's future. This seems to indicate that some of liberalism's foundations are, at least in part, rooted in eschatological expectations, albeit of an intramundane, moralistic, and humanistic nature. Whether it takes the form of Kant's ethical commonwealth, in the hope of realizing the kingdom of God on earth, or Mill's Religion of the Future, with its

¹⁵¹ Raeder (2002) comments that "...when human beings learn to achieve complete happiness in this life – which the widespread embrace of Religion of Humanity will undoubtedly bring about, if not to morrow then someday – they will no longer require the consolation of otherworldly hopes and aspirations...Mill was convinced that this religion...is destined to be the Religion of the Future" (233).

eneration of humanity and progress, it is difficult to overlook the teleological dimension in liberalism.¹⁵²

Some may argue, however, that the previous discussion of Kant and Mill pertains to a socio-political environment heavily influenced by metaphysical debates and preoccupations that are not relevant to a more contemporary setting. Granted, some authors have noted that earlier socio-political controversies were framed around the prevalent metaphysical concerns of the time (Blumenberg 1983; Michalson 1990). Both Kant and Mill not only had to address religious questions, as they devised their political ideals, but they also had to be very careful in doing so. Yet this acknowledgment does not dispense with the eschatological perspective in political liberalism, in particular; and Western political thought, in general. Kant and Mill may be earlier examples of this phenomenon but, as commentators have pointed out, teleological preoccupations still persist in modern political thought.¹⁵³

A contemporary case in point is Michael Walzer's writings. In a study that analyzes Walzer's theory, John Revereing notes that there is a systematic interweaving of eschatological themes in the theorist's work. Walzer's political theory, Revereing argues, is eminently a "critical eschatology," which expresses the hope for the realization of a political community of intense conversation, referred to as the "messianic age" (Revereing 2005, 96). It is in light of this special future age that, according to Revereing, the theorist's entire work should be considered. Revereing warns, however, that the

¹⁵² The eschatological perspective in liberalism may not be entirely obvious at first, but as Tinder (1965) has suggested "no one can escape having certain attitudes toward 'the last things,' although they may be unstated and unrecognized" (314).

¹⁵³ See, for instance, Manuel (1966); Pocock (1989); Lyotard (1997); Gray (2007).

eschatological emphasis in Walzer's theory is neither an attempt to do theology nor should it be interpreted as an effort to foretell humankind's socio-political future.

Rather, Walzer's critical eschatology is a hopeful vision, or an ideal, that, like Kant's and Mill's own expectations, should "inspire practice" (Revering 2005, 114).

Whether it takes the form of ideals, aspirations or complex philosophical systems, the eschatological element in Western thought has remained a consistent theme and has sparked considerable debate. Such debate can be aptly illustrated by what has become known as the Löwith-Bumenberg polemic.¹⁵⁴ Keeping this debate in sight, but more pertinent to the purposes of this chapter, John Gray has also advanced the idea that eschatology remains an important element in contemporary Western political thought, which includes the controversial proposition concerning political liberalism's victory and the end of history. Gray argues that

[t]he world in which we find ourselves at the start of the new millennium is littered with the debris of utopian projects, which though they were framed in secular terms that denied the truth of religion were in fact vehicles for religious myths... the radical Enlightenment belief that there can be a sudden break in history, after which the flaws of human society will be for ever abolished, is a by-product of Christianity... [Indeed] Christianity injected the belief that human history is a teleological process... Fukuyama inherited this teleology, which underpins [his] talk of "end of history." In that view, history is a movement, not necessarily inevitable but in the direction of a universal goal, theories of progress also rely on a teleological view. (Gray 2007, 1-7).¹⁵⁵

The arguments put forth by the American political thinker Francis Fukuyama

¹⁵⁴ According to Bull (1995) this debate centers on the question of "whether or not the development of secular philosophies of history can accurately be described as a secularization of Christian eschatology" (8). For a more detailed discussion on this debate, see Wallace (1981).

¹⁵⁵ Lyotard (1997) also remarks that "eschatology, properly called, which governs the modern imaginary of historicity, is what the Christianity rethought of Paul and Augustine introduced into the core of Western thought" (96).

seem to give expression to this abiding eschatological perspective in Western thinking. By proposing that we arrived at the “end” of human ideological history, Fukuyama reiterates some of his predecessors’ intramundane hope in humankind’s development towards a determined socio-political future.¹⁵⁶ In this regard, Fukuyama continues within the Kantian and Millian tradition in believing that humanity has the potential of progressing forward to the ultimate goal of a stable and open civilization.¹⁵⁷ More importantly, however, Fukuyama’s arguments put liberal democracy at the center of this linear, progressive procession. After all, according to Fukuyama (1995), the “end point of mankind’s evolution” is represented by the “universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government,” and “the only viable alternative for technologically advanced societies” (3).¹⁵⁸

But how does Fukuyama arrive at his eschatological thesis about the end of history, which culminates with the “unabashed victory of political liberalism”? To answer this question we need to consider two essential parts of Fukuyama’s argument: the *empirical* and the *normative* one. The purpose of such an incursion into Fukuyama’s work is to avoid the mistake made by some commentators who, as Manghani (2008) observed, “mis-read its argument, as well as others who did not even (fully) read it, yet felt familiar enough with its title to enter into the debate” (113). Note, however, that the

¹⁵⁶ As Held (1996) explains Fukuyama’s sequence of arguments “represents a progressive and purposive path in human development from partial and pluralistic ideologies, such as those which buttressed monarchies and aristocracies, to those with more universal appeal. In the modern period we have reached, in Fukuyama’s judgment, the final stage of this development” (279).

¹⁵⁷ Fukuyama makes explicit references to Kant’s views of history, including the philosopher’s understanding of the “selfish but progressive antagonism of man’s ‘asocial sociability’” (Fukuyama 1992, 58).

¹⁵⁸ See also Fukuyama (2000, 282).

following discussion is not going to address every facet of Fukuyama's thought and its possible implications. The focus will remain on those aspects that are more relevant for my overall objective.

Concerning Fukuyama's empirical argument, it clearly underlines his philosophical conviction that, similar to Kant's own understanding, there is a universal aspect to humankind's history.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, Fukuyama is at pains to explain how this suggestion of a universal progressive history of humankind is not only possible but ultimately necessary to the understanding of political developments that marked the end of the past century.¹⁶⁰ For Fukuyama, the existence of a historical progression is closely associated with the economic development that has been occurring throughout the world since the Industrial Revolution. This economic growth is of a progressive nature, and it is the outcome of scientific knowledge, which, in turn, has spurred a technological revolution that cannot be reversed (Fukuyama 1995, 32).

The advancement of technology, according to Fukuyama, propels societies in an almost deterministic direction, which has as its upshot the uniform reorganization of

¹⁵⁹ "...the appearance of democratic forces in parts of the world where they were never expected to exist, the instability of authoritarian form of government, and the complete absence of coherent *theoretical* alternatives to liberal democracy force us to raise Kant's old question anew: Is there such a thing as a Universal History of mankind, taken from a point of view far more cosmopolitan than was possible in Kant's day?...our provisional answer is yes" (Fukuyama, 1992, 70, 126). According to Ceaser (2003), Fukuyama's views constitute "the first genuinely new and important statement of a Philosophy of History in more than half a century... Accounts today that adopt the theme 'globalization' often echo Fukuyama's basic thesis and embrace a soft version of a Philosophy of History. Where these accounts view the process of globalization in a benign light, they resemble versions of the progressive view of History; where they deplore it, they resemble a form of Historical pessimism. In either case, an idea of History is lurking just beneath the surface" (54-5).

¹⁶⁰ According to Fukuyama (1995), a universal history is a concept that tries to find "a coherent pattern to the evolution of human societies when taking into account the experiences of all peoples in all times..." (13). More succinctly, a universal history is "an attempt to find a meaningful pattern in the overall development of human societies generally" (Fukuyama 1992, 55).

every social group that adopts its standards.¹⁶¹ That is not to say, however, that all societies will have to experience the same set of developmental stages that were common to the more industrialized nations, such as England and the United States. Each country will have its own path to modernization, but the end result will reveal that all societies that adopted the Western technological model will have similar traits such as “urbanization, rational authority, bureaucratization, an ever-ramified [and] complex division of labor...” (Fukuyama 1992, 32). Indeed, all social groups will eventually experience, in their own way, the impact of the universal dissemination of scientific knowledge and technology. In Fukuyama’s historical scheme, “modern natural science regulates the direction of economic development” and becomes the human-made Mechanism by which progressive, directional socio-historical changes occur as well.¹⁶²

The difficulty that confronts Fukuyama, however, is whether this Mechanism has, as one of its inevitable by-products, the universalization of liberal democracy. Fukuyama indeed believes that such is the case, at least in part. As empirical evidence of this conclusion, he cites Seymour Martin Lipset’s and Larry Diamond’s observations concerning the relationship between economic development and democracy.¹⁶³ For Fukuyama, it is significant that Diamond’s study echoes some of Lipset’s earlier findings in concluding that, although “economic development is not a prerequisite for

¹⁶¹ Fukuyama calls this a “weak determinism” (Fukuyama 2006, 354).

¹⁶² “We have selected modern natural science as a possible underlying ‘Mechanism’ of directional historical change, because it is the only large-scale social activity that is by consensus cumulative and therefore directional” (Fukuyama 1992, 80).

¹⁶³ Diamond’s (1992) study, “Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered,” is, in fact, a reassessment of Lipset’s (1959) “Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy.”

democracy,” there is a noticeable correlation between these two variables (Diamond 1992, 485). Armed with these data, Fukuyama feels confident to affirm that, as far as evidence goes, “the existence of an *empirical* connection” between high levels of industrial development and democracy “is undeniable” (Fukuyama 1992, 117).

Fukuyama then reasons out that “...the progressive unfolding of modern natural science determines in broad outline the economic modernization process, which in turn creates a predisposition toward liberal democracy” (Fukuyama 1995, 33).

The author of *The End of History* understands, however, that his argument about the synergy between democracy and economic development is only a partial elucidation of the phenomenon under his consideration. Fukuyama concedes, for example, that empirical evidence alone is not sufficient to ground his theory, because, ultimately, economics cannot adequately explain why democracy prevails over other political systems.¹⁶⁴ Fukuyama suggestively concludes that “the economic account of history gets us to the gates of the Promised Land of liberal democracy, but it does not deliver us to the other side” (Fukuyama 1992, 134). The passing through the gates of Paradise will have to wait for Fukuyama’s normative argument regarding the superiority of liberal democracy over other ideologies.¹⁶⁵ In fact, the eschatological metaphor of crossing to

¹⁶⁴ Economic development alone “...does not explain democracy itself, for if we look more deeply into the process, we find that democracy is almost never chosen for economic reasons” (Fukuyama 1992, 134).

¹⁶⁵ In an interview to a Brazilian newspaper a few days after September 11, 2001, Fukuyama made it clear that liberal democracy is the most powerful alternative to any other form of political organization; and that he has no doubt that liberalism is winning. When asked, in the same interview, whether he believed that some Islamic countries could turn into liberal democracies, Fukuyama answered that “Maybe not in a short period of time... But if we consider Iran, it is very likely that the next generation should implement some political changes that will open the system. It is important to consider that there are liberal movements in the Muslim world, indeed there are some” (Guandalini 2001, np).

the Promised Land is very revealing because it is in the articulation of his normative thesis that Fukuyama's teleological vision finally becomes salient.

Concerning the normative argument, Fukuyama relies heavily on G.W. F. Hegel's views about history and human nature.¹⁶⁶ Briefly, concerning history, Hegel's views are important for Fukuyama because the German philosopher could not conceive human existence as a succession of indefinite, pointless events. On the contrary, as Fukuyama explains, history, for Hegel, would come to a conclusion with the "achievement of free societies in the real world. There would be, in other words, an *end of history*" (Fukuyama 1992 64, 135).¹⁶⁷ But it is the Hegelian concept of human nature that really interests Fukuyama. In Fukuyama's view, economics plays an instrumental role in effecting significant changes in history, but the element that forces conclusive alterations towards humankind's *telos* is something much more basic and primeval; something embedded in human nature itself: the struggle for recognition (Fukuyama 1992, 135). Hence, alongside the economic Mechanism, Fukuyama applies an anthropological Mechanism, which furnishes him with a transhistorical and permanent element in human society. As he explains,

[t]he Mechanism created by modern science remains a partial and ultimately unsatisfactory account of the historical process... Hegel provides us with an alternative "Mechanism" by which to understand the historical process, one based on the "struggle for recognition." While we need not to abandon our economic account of history, "recognition" allows us to recover a totally non-

¹⁶⁶ Fukuyama (1995) points out that while Kant "was the first to raise the possibility of writing a universal history...Kant wrote that he could only propose, but not complete, this task, something attempted seriously for the first time by his successor Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hege" (13).

¹⁶⁷ It is important to bear in mind that Fukuyama's notion of the end of history is not meant "as an end to our *experience* of history – that is, the end of passing of time...the proper argument for the 'end of history' is that there are now certain *structural limits* (of ideology) within which events will unfold" (Manghani 2008, 113).

materialistic historic dialectic that is much richer in its understanding of human motivation... (Fukuyama 1992, 144).

Fukuyama comments that the basic human need for recognition goes beyond a desire to be acknowledged *by* other human beings. An individual also hungers for recognition *as* a human being. Unfortunately, this search for recognition as human being is not a peaceful one. According to Fukuyama (1992), while people are “fundamentally other-directed” in their need for recognition, which makes them irredeemably social, their communal behavior is paradoxical for it does not lead to assent, conformity or cooperation, but it takes individuals “into a violent struggle to the death” (147). One of the possible upshots of this deadly conflict is the establishment of a relationship of lordship and bondage, in which the victorious side (the master), having risked his life in the struggle and having won, finally achieves the recognition he desires. The prestige and acknowledgement acquired by the master forces the loser into a state of slavery.

Fukuyama defines this innate human desire for recognition as *thymos*, and he suggests that this element is quite unstable. He admits, for instance, that it is not uncommon for human beings to move beyond their desire for recognition (*thymos*). Human nature invariably puts its best efforts towards *megalothymia*, i.e., the need to be perceived as superior to other individuals. Machiavelli, Fukuyama explains, understood this concept quite well, when the Italian thinker defined it as “desire for glory.” Machiavelli also saw that *megalothymia* “created special problems by leading ambitious man to tyranny and the rest to slavery” (Fukuyama 1992, 184). In fact, *megalothymia*, when applied to the political realm, can create significant issues since it can lead to all sorts of abuses, oppression and tyrannies. But Fukuyama recognizes that there is another

side to *thymos*. This other aspect stands in stark contrast to *megalothymia*, and it is referred to as *isothymia*, i.e., a desire to be recognized as equal to other people.

These two expressions of *thymos* are important concepts in Fukuyama's understanding of universal history because, as he points out, "*megalothymia* and *isothymia* together constitute the two manifestations of desire for recognition around which the historical transition to modernity can be understood" (Fukuyama 1992, 182). In other words, the modern world and democracy itself have been shaped by humanity's movements around *thymos* and its derivatives. Democracy, for instance, is the arena where *megalothymia* was allowed to manifest itself in a constructive manner, because, in a democratic system, ambition is used to counteract ambition (Fukuyama 1992, 182).

As Fukuyama points out

[t]he different branches of [democratic] government were seen as avenues for the advancement of powerful ambitions, but the system of checks and balances would ensure that these ambitions canceled each other out and prevented the emergence of tyranny. (Fukuyama 1992, 188)

Alongside democracy, Fukuyama concedes that there were other movements that attempted to deal with the thymotic aspect of an individual's social behavior. The Christian religion was one of these movements. In fact, this "absolute religion," made a lasting contribution concerning the human struggle for recognition through its concept of equality. Christian equality, Fukuyama explains, requires that all human beings be put in the same position before God, as moral agents, with the ability to choose between right and wrong. This concept of equality does not take into account, at least not *a priori*, external factors such as courage and strength. Rather, it emphasizes human beings' moral ability, which is both an internal as well as an universal characteristic. In

this sense, Christianity reinforces the thymotic aspect of human beings by assuring them of their self-worth from the inside out. This concept has had a concrete socio-political effect, particularly in the West. Fukuyama suggests, for instance, that Martin Luther King stressed this Christian notion of self-worth when the civil-rights leader defended the idea that human dignity is not based on external factors, but on the moral character of each individual (Fukuyama 1992, 197).

Hence, Christianity contributes in this process of humanity's tortuous search for recognition by offering to the oppressed and the slave a clear vision of human dignity that is not based on external attributes or advantages. In Christianity, there is the awareness that it is God himself who finally supplies the acknowledgment human beings crave for. The Deity recognizes the slave for what he or she is; moral agents who have in themselves worth and dignity, independent of any achievement or performance (Fukuyama 1992, 197). In God's kingdom, human beings' thymotic conflict finally finds its resolution since, the "Kingdom of Heaven... presents the prospect of a world in which the *isothymia* of every man – though not the *megalothymia* of the vainglorious – will be satisfied" (Fukuyama 1992, 197). But, ultimately, Christianity failed to implement universal and permanent changes in human society. Its failure, curiously, is related to this religion's eschatological assumptions.

As an ideology, Christianity is crippled by a major flaw. This limitation is the result of the Christian promise that comprehensive human recognition and equality are, in the final analysis, only possible in the other-worldly or heavenly realm. The failure of Christianity lies in its impossibility of bringing about an equitable *telos* to humankind in

this present reality. This religion can only promote a vision of freedom and justice to be implemented outside this life. Therefore, despite its important understanding of equality, which helped the development of a Western conscience concerning the creation of just societies, the eschatological teaching of Christianity, in reality, reinforces the slaves' oppression and accommodation to their present state of bondage. According to this religion, slaves should not look for ultimate recognition in this life, their only hope for equality lies in a life outside the boundaries of this existence. As Fukuyama sums up,

Christianity... had the right concept of freedom, but ended up reconciling real-world slaves to their lack of freedom by telling them not to expect liberation in this life... He reconciled himself to a life of slavery on earth in the belief that he would be redeemed later by God, when in fact he could be his own redeemer. (Fukuyama 1992, 197)

For Fukuyama, Christianity started, in the West, the process of human liberation but it could not accomplish its *telos*. Therefore, there was the need for the "secularization of Christianity," which essentially morphed its eschatological idea of extramundane equality into a concept of justice and freedom that can be achieved, by human beings, in the present life (Fukuyama 1992, 198). For Hegel and Fukuyama, it is in the French revolution that the secularized version of Christian *eschaton* takes shape in history. Liberty and equality, which, in the Christian religion, lay in an undermined future, could now be implemented on earth. In other words, the *telos* that Christianity promised for a distant and heavenly life is now accomplishable by humanity, in history, through socio-political movements and revolutions. Indeed, according to Fukuyama, the contemporary liberal democratic form of government "that came into being in the

aftermath of the French Revolution was...the realization of the Christian ideal of freedom and universal human equality in the here-and-now” (Fukuyama 1992, 199).¹⁶⁸

Hence, in Fukuyama’s understanding, history comes to a close not only because there is a final consensus among the world’s nations that liberal democracy is the best form of human government for a free and modern society, but also because of the lack of real ideological competitors to liberal democracy, which includes religious ideologies and their extramundane eschatological visions.¹⁶⁹ Liberalism, according to Fukuyama, has introduced in history a political system organized around the concept of equality, which has brought about many desirable consequences that were only promised by other ideologies. To name just a few of these outcomes, liberal democracy accomplished the breakdown of social classes, the transformation of human instincts of domination and the concrete expectation that “[p]eace will arise...out of the specific nature of democratic legitimacy, and its ability to satisfy the human longing for recognition” (Fukuyama 1992, 263-79). Humankind, through liberal democracy, finally arrives at a realized-secularized-eschatology, which sets itself as an alternative to other political and religious teleological views.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ For Gray (2007), “the proposition that ‘western liberal democracy’ is ‘the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution’ is a confession of eschatological faith” (125).

¹⁶⁹ Fukuyama believes that “if we looked beyond liberal democracy and markets, there was nothing else towards which we could expect to evolve; hence the end of history” (quoted in Ceaser 2003, 54). As Held (1996) explains “Liberalism is the victorious ideology...The chief rivals of liberalism in the twentieth century, fascism and communism, either have failed or are failing. And contemporary challengers – religious movements such as Islam or nationalistic movements such as those found in East Europe today – articulate only partial or incomplete ideologies; that is to say, they champion beliefs that cannot be sustained without the support of other ideologies. Neither religious nor nationalist belief system provides coherent alternatives to liberalism in the long term and, therefore, have no ‘universal significance’” (279).

¹⁷⁰ Grenz and Franke (2001) observe that Fukuyama’s views on liberalism and Christian eschatology “embody a particular vision of the *telos*, or goal, of human life on earth. Both are convinced that ultimately human history is singular and unidirectional. And both are aware that the goal they envision

In this final ideological stage of socio-political history, human beings enter, using Fukuyama's own analogy, the liberal democratic "paradise," only to realize that, despite their freedom, human beings are still unhappy and struggling with each other. Indeed, Fukuyama's final vision for humankind, after the worldwide liberal revolution, is far from ideal, which begs the question whether liberal democracy is really free of contradictions (Fukuyama 1992, 139). Be that as it may, with the passing through the gates of the Promised Land of liberal democracy, Fukuyama's eschatological vision is finally concluded. This eschatological good news leads Fukuyama to express an evangelical, apocalyptic, and almost imperialistic vision for humanity, in his suggestion that

...the United States and other democracies have a long-term interest in preserving the sphere of democracy in the world, and in expanding it where possible and prudent. That is, if democracies do not fight one another, then a steadily expanding post-historical world will be more peaceful and prosperous. (Fukuyama 1992, 280)¹⁷¹

Conclusion

In light of Kant's, Mill's and Fukuyama's views, as discussed previously, it is possible to argue that, in general, the liberal tradition proposes a historical salvation that is essentially anthropocentric. Such a suggestion entails that human redemption from evil, selfishness and lack of recognition can be accomplished through the establishing of intramundane socio-political institutions.¹⁷² As Cortright (2009) observes, this reliance

cannot remain merely on the abstract, theoretical, and futurist level but has the capacity to inform – even transform – life in the present" (240).

¹⁷¹ Fukuyama's expansionist views are clearly underscored by his belief that liberal values are indeed universal. Cf. Fukuyama's Afterword in the 2006 edition of *The End of History and the Last Man*.

¹⁷² Cf. Rawls (1999).

on socio-political schemes to deal with humankind's struggles and aspirations is one of the central aspects of the theory of democratic liberalism, which was originally predicated upon a certain view of human nature. Such a view, Cortright (2009) explains, relies on the hopeful proposition that "human communities could evolve to create a more peaceful and just political order" (243). While religion rests its expectations on a divine end-times vision for the final solution of humankind's social fallen condition - either in the expectation of a millennium brought about by extramundane intervention, or even in the coming of a mythical messianic figure as the Madhi - the secular view proposed by liberalism puts a potential eschatological solution within humanity's own reach. In the next chapter, I will explore some implications of this suggestion.

Suffice to say here that the first possible consequence of the eschatological conflict between the liberal tradition and its religious counterpart is a tendency, in liberal societies, to replace some metaphysical end-times expectations with a humanistic vision that outlines the realization of peace and progress through social arrangements. In the liberal view, the concept of an eschatological kingdom of political harmony becomes divested of any messianic-divine features, and it is given an ethical interpretation that proposes the establishing of a well-ordered society by means of morality and institutional procedure. In this perspective, social behavior is the central element in bringing about the *eschaton*, which emphasizes the human ability to transform and shape society towards an end that, from a religion point-of-view, only the Deity should be able to accomplish. Second, it seems likely that as liberalism attempts to expand, through the process of democratization, it will encounter resistance from some social groups. I

believe that such resistance will come from some religious groups in the form of eschatological ideologies. These ideologies will ultimately resist liberal ideas by promoting their own alternative vision for humankind's socio-political future.

But, if the liberal-religious conflict is set aside for a moment, the message that comes through the arguments presented in this chapter is that the core of a liberal eschatology is the searching for a final resolution to humankind's struggles and alienation. This preoccupation seems evident, for instance, in the Kantian ethical community, which is a sincere attempt to deal with the universal problem of human evil and its social consequence. Mill's eschatological Religion of the Future also showed a desire to outline a secular-faith based mechanism by which human beings could be transported from a state of selfishness to the realm of unlimited universal progress. The urge for effecting final and conclusive changes in humankind's socio-political interaction is also observable in Fukuyama's alleged triumph of liberalism, which proclaims the end of destructive human ideological battles.

Hence, in these aforementioned liberal author's arguments and proposals, there is a positive, honest and substantial concern with humankind's *telos* and future. Such preoccupation implies that an eschatological reading of liberalism may, in fact, shed some light on a constructive and vital aspect of this tradition. The recognition that liberalism may carry a certain eschatological outlook is, granted, controversial but it should not be construed as a negative or depreciative assessment of some of its foundational assumptions. On the contrary, such approach points to a possible common ground with other traditions, which may facilitate a more civil and productive dialogue

among these groups. If the concern with eschatology flows from observing humankind in its historical setting, by hoping for a better future alternative for its socio-political life, then, in this sense, liberal and religious eschatological concerns may represent an important overlapping upon which these traditions can build upon.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Alexis Tocqueville, very perceptively, once remarked that “the spirit of man, left to its own bent, will regulate political society and the City of God in uniform fashion; it will, if I dare put it so, seek to *harmonize* earth with heaven” (Tocqueville 2000, 287). If Tocqueville is correct, attempts to bring into line hopes that belong to an eschatological reality with intramundane expectations are more than mere cultural or historical idiosyncrasies. Rather, such attempts seem to be part of some deep human aspirations that tend to surface from time to time, in different places, and in diverse social contexts. Thus, unlike Augustine, the Puritans thought it possible, at least to a certain extent, to establish a type of a kingdom of God in the New World. Such was indeed a powerful vision, one that still lingers in the mind of many conservative Christians in America. But, as I attempted to demonstrate, such eschatological impulse in politics is not limited to Christian communities. The formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran shows that the eschatological impetus in the public sphere does not have ethnic or religious boundaries. Khomeini astutely reinterpreted and made use of Islamic eschatological beliefs to promote his own version of a modern Muslim state. Curiously, when considered from this teleological perspective, one can observe how two very distinct, and sometimes rival, societies share a common element: both America and Iran are, in part, the product

of eschatological visions. Yet, as I also argued, there seems to be an eschatological aspect even in a secular tradition such as liberalism. At first, this liberal eschatological outlook may not be so apparent, but a closer examination also yields the conclusion that hope for the future is not confined to religious political traditions.

These previous remarks highlight my intention up to this point: the attempt to understand intra-tradition eschatological and political interactions. But such was only the primary objective. There is also this work's broader goal of assessing the interface of these traditions' diverse and, at times, conflicting teleological expectations. In these concluding paragraphs, I would like to suggest three main observations when approaching the interaction among these traditions. Note that I will not offer an analysis of how Christian and Islamic views interact, but, with the intent of maintaining my focus on liberalism, I contrast these religions' eschatological outlooks, as discussed in this work, with the liberal tradition. I will state these three concluding thoughts briefly here, since I will develop them more fully in the course of this chapter.

The first observation suggests a source of tension between liberalism and the American religious tradition regarding views about the country. This tension is related to liberalism's secular character and its intramundane teleological understanding of humankind's socio-political history. More specifically, I would like to suggest that for liberal ideals concerning the future of humankind to be implemented, some eschatological assumptions held by religious groups in America have to give way to secular views. In this sense, religious eschatological expectations need to be lifted, so that a more tangible perspective about the country's destiny can flourish and produce the

secular fruits of freedom and equality. The second observation focuses on liberalism in its interaction with Islamic eschatological hopes. The main issue in this second concluding thought is related to the universalistic character of liberal teleology and the Islamic resistance to it. Resistance to liberalism comes in many forms, but, as is suggested by the example of Iran, Islamic eschatological beliefs may represent a considerable obstacle in attempts to implement liberal democracy in the region. Thirdly, I believe that there is a seed of hope in the interaction of these three often conflicting views about the future of humankind. Indeed, the two sacred eschatologies previously discussed share one aspect in common with liberalism: they are attempts to reach a final resolution to humankind's political conflicts and social alienation. Such preoccupation indicates that an eschatological approach to liberalism may not be as counterproductive as some may think. Rather, it may suggest the existence of a point of contact, or even a common ground, among these three traditions, which may lead to a better dialogue among these groups.

Conservative Christians, Liberalism and the Redefinition of America's Future

In the first pages of Richard Hughes' *Christian American and the Kingdom of God*, the author asserts with considerable conviction that "the idea of Christian American is a powerful, seductive, and potentially destructive theme in American life, culture, and politics" (Hughes 2009, 1). Hughes goes on to explain how the persistent Puritan understanding that situates God's earthly kingdom in America has been actively fostered by a considerable number of conservative Christian leaders, a vision that many

of their followers simply embrace as a given truth. As I have argued, when considering this religious group, one cannot overlook its enduring teleological vision for the country. The eschatological comprehension of America has considerably shaped how believers understand the nation and its mission in the world. I also pointed out earlier that one of the outcomes of such powerful religious tradition is the notion of “patriotic eschatologism.” The concept of “patriotic eschatologism” can be simply defined as the fusion of end-times metaphysical claims with political and social expectations about the country.¹⁷³ But these observations on how millions of American citizens perceive their country are more than curious religious trivia. As Hughes’ comments suggest, these teleological convictions are a significant source of political tension.

Granted, it is plausible to argue that, for a considerable number of contemporary conservative Christians, this perspective about America as the precursor of the golden age of the millennium is simply too idealistic, and one which no longer seems viable (Clouse 2008). Hence, contrary to the original Puritan understanding, the eschatological view of several believers dismisses, *a priori*, this mythical idea of America.¹⁷⁴ Yet, as Clouse (2008) has warned, this attitude is highly ambivalent. In practice, the prevailing mindset of even those conservatives who declare indifference towards the country’s *eschaton* is one that still conceives America as having an exceptional and important role in the future of humankind. Such dualism that underscores this contradictory outlook

¹⁷³ An interesting example of such concern is Hagee’s (2010) *Can America Survive? 10 Prophetic Signs that we are a Terminal Generation*.

¹⁷⁴ For several individuals in the conservative Christian camp, the country that will play a central role in God’s future plan for the world is the nation of Israel itself. This belief has been translated in Conservative circles as an almost unconditional support for the state of Israel and the Jewish people all over the world (Cf. Falwell 1981; Hagee 2001).

points to a remarkable inconsistency between what many conservative Christians believe as a matter of theological principle and their “interpretation of world events and their desire to be patriotic Americans” (Clouse 2008, 269).¹⁷⁵

In essence, as a group, American conservative Christians today continue to hold to similar eschatological standards that characterized the Puritans in their expectations for the country’s future (Marshall and Manuel 1977). These expectations have had, in fact, very practical political results in contemporary America. For instance, teleological beliefs about the country were part of President George W. Bush’s speeches about the war on terror, which underlined the country’s special role in delivering “the gift of liberty” to peoples and nations around the world (Stone 2007). Moreover, as Lindsay pointed out, the president’s speeches had an apocalyptic overtone that grabbed the attention and support of conservative Christians.¹⁷⁶ This religious group, at that time, was convinced that Bush’s religious zeal and rhetoric fell “within a long tradition of presidents referring to [the country’s] divine purpose and providence... There is nothing Bush has said... that Abraham Lincoln did not say” (Lindsay 2007, 25).¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ In this case, unconditional support for the state of Israel tends to coexist side-by-side with the concept of “patriotic eschatologism.”

¹⁷⁶ Several events in American political history are understood by many conservatives as having eschatological significance since, as Harding (2000) explains, eschatology “is not always political in the sense of advocating specific actions that count as political in A merican culture, but it is always political. It is a kind of narrative politics that contests the dominant secular or modern voices of journalists and academics for control over the definition and meaning of current events and of history more broadly” (234).

¹⁷⁷ Bush is not the only example of how private religious faith has played a role in the decisions of those in the country’s highest office. In his study of eleven American presidents, Smith (2006) concludes that “faith affected how numerous occupants of the Oval Office performed their duties. Their faith influenced their philosophy of governing; relationship with religious constituents, electoral strategies, and approach to public policies. Moreover, it helped shape their convictions and character, as well as their views of the separation of church and state, civil religion, and A merican chosennes” (vii).

For most believers in the conservative Christian camp, the divine purpose and providential status of the country is a well established truth, which reinforces their belief that Americans are “the modern chosen people,” and their preachers the “modern version of ancient prophets,” hence, conservative leaders’ tendency to “practice a prophetic brand of politics” (Lienesch 1993, 157).¹⁷⁸ Their use of jeremiads constitutes a concrete example of this prophetic self-perception. Of particular significance here is the socio-political content of these jeremiads. In fact, the core of conservative leaders’ prophetic utterances centers on their belief that, due to a liberal influence, the original American ideal as a millennial nation is being consistently undermined. In its place, a secular hope is being implemented, one that disassociates the country’s future, and past, from any metaphysical claims. For these leaders, the negation of America’s millenarian character is a considerable preoccupation, for it not only constitutes a rejection of the divine blessings associated with the nation’s original and special call as a chosen people, but it also prefigures calamitous spiritual, moral, ethical and political consequences for the country and for the entire world (Hagee 2010).¹⁷⁹

Now, the idea that conceives America as a chosen nation, with a special purpose in the divine plan for the end-times, is a religious construal that may find very little support among non-conservative Christians. For many Americans, this notion comes across as a bizarre and naïve suggestion, one that should not prevail in a liberal society. Of course, from a liberal perspective, at stake here is not the veracity of any religious eschatological role assigned to the country. Liberalism’s attitude is essentially one of

¹⁷⁸ Cf. also Bellah (1975); Marshal and Manuel (1977).

¹⁷⁹ See my previous discussion on Christianity and eschatology.

neutrality and agnosticism about these comprehensive claims. On the other hand, the implications of these metaphysical convictions cannot pass unnoticed in a liberal society. Conservatives' beliefs about America's *telos* are more than mere private, anachronistic observations concerning the country's divine destiny. As already suggested, these convictions make social, moral and political demands which, ultimately, cannot be allowed in a liberal democracy as decisive arguments in public political decisions. For instance, to permit the religious argument that the country is in need of political and social reforms based on Pat Robertson's assertion that a morally debilitated America will facilitate the rise of the Antichrist is to consent to an exclusive metaphysical assertion that extends its reach into the public sphere. Such would be inappropriate and contrary to liberalism's central tenants (Dombrowski 2001).

Nevertheless, denying explicit religious arguments, such as teleological beliefs about America, from a role in matters of public deliberation gives credence to the concern of critics like LaHaye and Falwell, who are convinced that liberalism is effectively effacing what they consider to be the country's original outlook.¹⁸⁰ These critics' preoccupation, however, may not be completely unfounded. Whether one agrees with these conservative leaders' beliefs, it seems clear that one of the outcomes of liberal political ideals and institutions is the fundamental social change effected through the molding of "citizen's character and aims," which, consequently, shape "the kinds of persons they are and aspire to be" (Rawls 2005, 68).¹⁸¹ It may be added that, in doing

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Clermont (2009) for an exclusive Catholic approach on the conservative resistance to liberalism.

¹⁸¹ Tomasi (2001) has also pointed out that "liberals have increasingly recognized that liberal institutions unavoidably influence the ethical worldviews of all reasonable citizens" (14).

so, liberal ideology also shapes the way citizens perceive the future of their societies. In the particular instance concerning conservative Christians' eschatological profile of the country as God's nation, it may be reasonable to assume that the liberal reshaping of such a notion, at least in the public sphere, is inevitable because, as the country's established political philosophy,

...political liberalism is committed to a certain form of secularism. This form holds that in modern conditions it is not reasonable to expect that all persons in a given society will be united around a religious foundation for public deliberation, never mind a single religious doctrine; because legitimate political power ought to justify itself to all persons subject to it... This is the dominant contemporary philosophical understanding of the separation of church and state. Although this understanding also seeks to limit "secular" public reason by not allowing it to proceed on grounds that explicitly deny the truth or value of religious beliefs, it nonetheless does not allow religious doctrine or law to triumph in coercive state institutions. When the two conflict, public reason trumps religious reason. Even if it tries to do so without negating religion, it does not allow that religious truth be brought to bear on society at large. For many believers, that alone is tantamount to denying religion. For them, there is no neutral space where religion is neither affirmed nor denied. By not affirming it, it is denied... One [of the options for religious people as liberal citizens is to have] their religious beliefs... *replaced* by new ones, at least those beliefs that conflict with liberal justice... (March 2009, 10)

Of course, recognizing the clash between liberalism and comprehensive religious doctrines is hardly novel. On the contrary, this problem has been examined from several different angles and it has already produced a considerable amount of literature (Clanton 2009; Sandel 1998; Quinn 2006). Nevertheless, one possible aspect that has been neglected in this discussion is the likelihood that a source of stress between liberalism and religion springs from their conflicting visions about the future. In other words, one of the bases for the uneasy relationship between liberal ideals and religious beliefs may be related to the dissonant eschatological expectations embedded in these views. To

better comprehend this rationale, it is important to bear in mind John Gray's suggestion that liberalism presupposes a certain historical outlook upon which several of its claims rely (Gray 1983, 131). This historical perspective found in the liberal tradition, Gray (2007) argues in his *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*, rests, in great part, on an eschatological perspective. As I have been arguing throughout this work, it is not only possible to trace political preoccupations in the eschatological views of religious people, but also it is conceivable to find eschatological concerns within political liberalism. Kant's, Mill's and Fukuyama's arguments about human progress and freedom involve a considerable teleological vision. This observation seems to give support to Gray's conclusion about the eschatological germ in the liberal tradition. Of course, again, liberalism is far from being a monolithic ideology, and many, in the modern liberal camp, will have little trouble rejecting several of these liberal authors' assumptions about human nature and history.

Nevertheless, even if some of Kant's, Mill's and Fukuyama's more controversial views are discarded, there is a strong possibility that several of the presuppositions embedded in their arguments may still lurk underneath the surface of liberalism's secular vision for humankind's future. One of the reasons for this continuity is that the ideas put forth by these liberal authors are not secondary to their understanding of what constitute the necessary requirements for the socio-political well-being of humankind. On the contrary, as I attempted to demonstrate, some of these views are essential elements of their thoughts, which may suggest that some of their eschatological assumptions may

still spill over into modern liberalism.¹⁸² And, as the abovementioned quote from March affirms, when there is a conflict between liberal and religious claims, including teleological ones, the basic recourse left to religious people, as liberal citizens, is to have their “beliefs...*replaced*” by liberal ones.¹⁸³ In fact, one of the aspects that surfaced in my discussion of liberalism and eschatology is this tradition’s propensity to replace and, at times, reject some fundamental aspects innate to religious eschatology. Mill’s and Fukuyama’s views are particularly relevant here.

In Mill’s case, for instance, the liberal thinker professed the conviction that otherworldly expectations centered on future rewards were counterproductive, selfish and immoral. For such reasons, Mill believed, these religious doctrines would have to be replaced by a more secular ethical and moral vision. Mill’s own views on the future of humankind’s freedom and progress became crystallized in his Religion of Humanity, which he offered as an alternative to supernatural, otherworldly religious beliefs. For Mill, this substitution of religious eschatological beliefs for more worldly ones was significant because it not only pointed to the liberation of humanity from selfish futuristic concerns but, perhaps more importantly, it also gave intellectual support to Mill’s own argument about the human species’ unlimited ability to shape its future. Of course, for Mill, the replacement of a religious eschatological outlook by his secular

¹⁸² For instance, Rawls’s (1999, 126) comment that “I call a world in which...great evils have been eliminated and just (or at least decent) basic institutions established by liberal and decent peoples who honor the Law of the Peoples a ‘realistic utopia,’” shares basic elements with some of the eschatological ideas discussed in the previous chapter.

¹⁸³ As Rawls (2005) also argues “political liberalism proposes that, in a constitutional democratic regime, comprehensive doctrines of truth or of right are to be replaced in public reason by an idea of the politically reasonable addressed to citizens as citizens” (55).

vision for humankind's *telos* should not pose any difficulties, since human beings can do "perfectly well without the belief of a heaven"; a perspective that seems to summarize Mill's position on metaphysical teleological issues in general (Mill 1963, 426-7).

Similarly, in Fukuyama's case for liberalism's victory over other ideologies, the author pointed out that religious eschatology, more specifically the Christian version, which places humankind's hope for freedom and recognition in an unspecified future, had a "major flaw" that required a corrective. This flaw was, according to Fukuyama, centered on Christianity's inability to implement its own system of values and justice in the "here-and-now." Also, Christian eschatological teaching was very socially costly, for it reinforced some of the abhorrent inequalities associated with human interactions. Thus, in Fukuyama's opinion, the Christian vision for the future of humanity had to be replaced with a more immediate, historical ideology which would help to implement, in the present life, the *telos* proposed by religious eschatological beliefs. This process of correcting the Christian view was initiated by the French revolution and it reached its climax in the contemporary "unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism" (Fukuyama 1995, 3). This liberal *eschaton*, Fukuyama has insisted, not only replaces an ineffective and flawed religious belief system that postpones human equality to a distant future, but it represents the final end point of humankind's ideological evolution as well (Fukuyama 1995, 3).¹⁸⁴

Mill's and Fukuyama's arguments suggest that liberalism's intramundane teleological vision for humankind aspires to function, at least in the public sphere, as a

¹⁸⁴ See also Fukuyama (2000, 282).

corrective in regards to religious eschatological postulations. In this sense, it can be argued that, in order for the liberal vision of humankind to take hold, teleological expectations of a religious nature need to be subverted or substitute for a more tangible, secular perspective. Liberalism, after all, also aims to shape the future according to its own standards (Gutmann 1985, 322). Consequently, it may be reasonable to assume that the liberal and the religious conceptions of humankind's future are not only competitors, but they may be unable to coexist as well. As Küenzlen (1987) argues, it is only when religion loses its eschatological hold on people's conscience that the field of history becomes open for "new secular world-interpretations," in the form of what he calls "revolutionary Messianic movements such as Marxism, Communism, liberalism, nationalism and anarchism" (212).

Indeed, if the "liberal utopia" of philosophers such as Richard Rorty (1989) comes to pass, religion will not only lose its teleological fascination for citizens, but it will completely disappear, since his ideal community is "enlightened, secular, through and through...one in which no trace of divinity remained" (45).¹⁸⁵ Curiously, Rorty's vision for a future liberal utopia also betrays, as is the case of Kant, Mill and Fukuyama, a certain progressive understanding of history which can be regarded as

¹⁸⁵ Cf. also Owen (2001). There is a strong feeling among conservative Christians that, in practice, this erasing of religion from the public square is already happening. Reed (1998), for instance, affirms that in today's America "when prosecutors are reprimanded because they quote from the Bible, when attorneys are told to remove ashes from their foreheads on Ash Wednesday, and when a Rabbi's simple prayer is ruled unconstitutional, our zeal for the separation of church and state has curdled into a sour distaste for religious expression. Today it is the religious person whose testimony or political activism may call into question based solely on their belief in God" (379).

eschatological.¹⁸⁶ On one hand, unlike Fukuyama, for instance, Rorty does not believe in the construction of a universal history to situate the prevalence of liberalism over other ideologies. Rorty simply calls his view about liberalism's universalistic appeal a "hunch," not a historical deduction. While, as Ceaser comments, calling his view a hunch "no doubt softens the blow," it cannot completely dismiss the impression that a teleological hope is also involved in Rorty's secular vision.¹⁸⁷ Therefore, in his description of the end-times' success of a liberal hope, Rorty's teleological arguments, at times, bear considerable similarity to those of Fukuyama. As Lawler explains,

Rorty learned what...Fukuyama learned from the fall of Communism. It is now impossible even for philosophers to imagine a plausible alternative for the future to liberal democracy, the just, universal, egalitarian political order. All that remains to be done is to attend to the details of its implementation. (Lawler 1999, 51)

I believe that the eschatological approach introduces a considerable problem for the dialogue between conservative Christianity and liberalism within the American context. It fundamentally points to the existence of two competing and, at times, incompatible teleological visions for the country. Conservative Christians' vision claims to rely on the original understanding of the country, which, they argue, is associated with a Puritan eschatology. This view is, for this group, a source of confidence in a divine plan for the nation, and it feeds their belief that, despite its many ambiguities and

¹⁸⁶ In describing his vision for the ideal liberal society Rorty (2005) argues that "the sacred or holy 'resides only in an ideal future...,' which is bound up with the hope that someday, any millennium now, my remote descendants will live in a global civilization in which love is pretty much the only law" (40).

¹⁸⁷ As Ceaser (2003) points out, "not only does Rorty deem such a progressive account useful in the sense of being able to induce people to do what he would like them to, but he even thinks it has a certain plausibility. In light of the collapse of Communism, Rorty announce his 'hunch...that Western social and political thought may have had the last *conceptual* revolution it needs'" (55).

shortcomings, America is still the object of divine favor (McKenna 2007; Elshtain 2000). This notion, however, relies in great part in the concept of “patriotic eschatologism” which asserts that, ultimately, America is “God’s country,” the New Jerusalem. As I argued previously, this concept makes substantial ethico-moral demands that are not sustainable in a liberal society.

The difficulty here, of course, relates to the fact that, for some conservative Christians, the country’s special millenarian character is not a peripheral religious conviction of secondary relevance. In a final analysis, these conservative religious individuals see it as an essential element closely tied to the country’s identity and well-being. They believe, for instance, that if the country stays true to its original call, America will “become the citadel of light which God intended her to be from the beginning!” (Falwell 1980, 266). But if the country succumbs to a secular liberal vision, as Timothy LaHaye, Pat Robertson, and Jerry Falwell fear is already the case, this will spell disaster for America and for the entire world.

Likewise, liberalism’s teleological views concerning humankind’s liberty and progress are not irrelevant and secondary notions. On the contrary, these notions are a consistent theme that appears in the ideals of many important thinkers in the liberal tradition. Moreover, these views for the future of humankind represent significant ideals regarding what constitute a moral and free secular society. Liberal eschatology takes the future of human social groups seriously and, as Peters (1978) suggests, “to think conscientiously about the future is to recognize that there is no escape from moral responsibility in the present” (5). Yet, in proposing its own vision for the future,

liberalism cannot help but shape and replace other competing teleological perceptions such as the one put forth by conservative Christians about America. The reason for the displacement of a metaphysical *telos* for the country is not accidental, for, as a Quinby has (1999) forcefully argued, religious eschatological “principles and practices interfere with the goals of democratic societies” (5).

If religious and liberal eschatologies are, as I suggested, competing views which attempt to shape the future of America, a relevant question is whether there is hope in reconciling these positions. The answer to this question, as is the case with many of the other questions raised by the religion-liberalism debate, is not a simple one. Yet, at the end of this chapter, I would like to suggest that there may be hope for this eschatological conundrum.

Muslims, Liberalism and Eschatological Resistance

The association of liberalism with a certain eschatological outlook is, as I attempt to show, certainly possible. Yet, for some, such a proposition may sound not only derogatory but entirely unhelpful. It may be derogatory because, despite earlier discussions of the secular use of eschatology, for some the suggestion of such a teleological strain in liberalism attaches to this tradition a concept that is still primarily perceived as metaphysical and religious. And, as a secular ideology, liberalism has made a considerable effort to evade any identification with such claims. Second, it may be unhelpful because the suggestion of teleological assumptions behind some of liberalism’s views leaves this tradition vulnerable to several of its critics’ accusations.

Some of these indictments imply that, to a certain extent, liberal ideals, which can be characterized as eschatological presuppositions, can and have become linked to universalistic, sometimes imperialistic, visions and policies.

A case in point is the criticism directed to interpretations of Kant's politico-teleological postulations concerning international peace, human nature and progress. Political scientist Barry Hindess points out that, for some commentators, Kant's teleology has become "a mere disguise for the interests of the privileged" (Hindess 2005, np).¹⁸⁸ Kant's visions of human development, cosmopolitan peace, and the ethical community have sometimes been used, Hindess reasons, in an oppressive manner because they make moral demands that are perceived, by Kant's supporters, as imperatives. In turn, these imperatives are applied as means to measure and evaluate the moral and ethical integrity of individuals and societies. Such an attitude culminates with Kant's "teleological universalism" being understood as a rationale "to bring all portions of humanity within the one *telos*" (Hindess 2005, np).¹⁸⁹

Liberalism's teleological propensities are also the object of John Gray's (2007) criticism of this tradition. Gray points out that the eschatological facet of liberalism is borrowed from its religious origin which, in his opinion, gives this secular ideology an essentially utopian viewpoint concerning the future of human interactions. Of greater concern is Gray's suggestion that liberalism's utopian aspect has infiltrated the political mainstream in the last century through the supposition that the only legitimate and

¹⁸⁸ For more detailed discussions on this issue see also Franke (2001); Bowden (2004); Tully (2008).

¹⁸⁹ The difficulty here relates to the fact that "Kant's ideas provide much of the framework through which international relations is now regularly conceived" (Franke 2001, 2). Apparently, however, many have made use of Kant's ideas inappropriately.

human-affirming political ideology is the Western-style liberal democracy. The practical consequence of this triumphal attitude, Gray explains, can be observed in the efforts to topple Iraq's tyrannical regime, which "was not only an American attempt to secure hegemony in the Middle East," but was also, echoing Hindess' abovementioned criticism, "a new kind of imperialism guided by liberal principles of human rights" (Gray 2007, 161). Aggressive attitudes from liberal societies towards illiberal ones, Gray (2007) then concludes, are spurred by the eschatological tendencies in liberalism, which, as a political tradition, has been as "utopian as other philosophies in positing a kind of ultimate harmony as an achievable goal" (197).

Hindess' and Gray's evaluations of the imperialistic character of liberalism may be too severe and controversial and, as such, these observations should be, perhaps, dismissed as mistaken understandings of misguided uses of liberal ideas. Yet I believe that Hindess' and Gary's suggestion of a persistent universalistic-teleological aspect in the liberal tradition cannot be easily brushed aside. John Rawls (1999), for example, in his *The Law of Peoples*, displays a vision for humankind that is certainly influenced by a secular eschatological hope. While, in his book, Rawls foresees that, in general, utopian visions for the world community may be hard to bring to fruition, he still articulates an "ideal theory" which, in the end, outlines a "realistic utopia" of "where we ought to want to be" (Brown 2002, 20).¹⁹⁰ Rawls' vision puts forth the belief that a stable and ordered international community of peoples is possible (Rawls 1999, 124). Rawls wisely shows

¹⁹⁰ In defining his "realistic utopia," Rawls (1999) affirms that "our hope for the future of our society rests on the belief that the social world allows for a reasonably just constitutional democracy existing as a member of a reasonably just Societies of Peoples" (11).

considerable caution concerning his “realistic utopia.” One of his disclaimers underscores, for instance, the unreasonableness of trying to impose an outsider’s perspective on those societies that do not fit within a certain liberal criteria (Rawls 1999, 93). Such concerns aside, Rawls, with considerable hope for the future, moves forward with his vision for a stable world. But when confronted with the real possibility that some social groups may not abide by his basic notions of civil rights and mutual respect, Rawls, who calls these societies “outlaw states,” sustains the position that these states should not be allowed to destabilize the harmony of his ideal international community (Rawls 1999, 90). Thus, within what he considers to be the realistic framework of his utopian theory, Rawls argues for sanctions and intervention with the purpose of effecting political and social changes in those outlaw states. As Rawls explicates,

the list of human rights honored by liberal and decent hierarchical regimes should be understood as universal rights in the following sense: they are intrinsic to the Law of Peoples and have a political (moral) effect whether or not they are supported locally. That is, their political (moral) force extends to all societies, and they are binding on all peoples and societies, including outlaw states. An outlaw state that violates these rights is to be condemned and in grave cases may be subjected to forceful sanctions and even intervention... The refusal to tolerate those states is a consequence of liberalism and decency. If the political conception of political liberalism is sound... then liberal and decent peoples have the right, under the Law of Peoples, not to tolerate outlaw states... Outlaw states are aggressive and dangerous; all peoples are safer and more secure if such states change, or are forced to change, their ways. (Rawls 1999, 79-81)

The relevant aspect of the Rawlsian “realistic utopia” is that its foundation rests on a universalistic understanding of some of liberalism’s basic claims (Rawls 1999, 128). As it is clear from Rawls’ argument, liberal ideology underpins his approach to international relations and human interactions, which includes the promotion of forceful actions against social groups that fall short of his liberal criteria. Apparently, there is no

reason, in Rawls' view, simply to tolerate or accommodate the evil and injustice that plague some human social groups. As is the case with Kant's own ideal represented in his ethical community, social evil is endemic and needs to be curbed and dealt with, lest the entire society of peoples be affected by it. Indeed, as a commentator has suggested, Rawls, in many ways, may deny metaphysical ideas in his political philosophy, but, similarly to Kant, he cannot completely avoid comprehensive claims, especially when confronted with humankind's future and the omnipresent problem of evil in socio-political interactions (Gregory 2007).¹⁹¹ Also, like Kant, when approaching the question of social evil, Rawls must hope for an ideal future community in which the "great evils of human history – unjust war, oppression, religious persecution, slavery and the rest" are eliminated (Rawls 1999, 126).¹⁹² Thus, in outlining his "reasonable hope," Rawls cannot suppress his belief that the political moral force embedded "in the list of human rights honored by liberalism" should extend to all societies. It is Rawls' hope for the future that human radical evil will be socially kept under control, allowing for the implementation of a stable and well-ordered international community of peoples.

The teleological tendency in liberalism should give one pause since visions for the future of humankind, such as that articulated by Rawls, may encounter resistance from certain societies. Such resistance may come, as is the case of some Muslim communities, in the form of an alternate teleological vision for the world. Indeed, as the case of Iran may indicate, this alternative perspective for the future may be intrinsically

¹⁹¹ Cf. also Neiman (2002, 314).

¹⁹² Brown (2002) comments that "like Kant, Rawls realized that his position of the nature of justice and the good life *within* the polity would be incomplete without an account of the relationship *between* polities (6).

connected with the belief in the appearance of the Islamic messiah, the Imam Mahdi. As I pointed out, during the Islamic Revolution led by the Ayatollah Khomeini, the eschatological element was used not only to ease the religious anxieties surrounding the movement, but as a means to shape political decisions as well. For instance, the *uluma*, under Khomeini's leadership, was turned into a political institution, a role that finds little precedent in Shia history. One of the claims supporting this change of emphasis for the *uluma* was the rationale that, as a religious institution, it also had the obligation of bringing into existence an Islamic government on behalf of the Hidden Imam Mahdi. The application of eschatological elements, during the revolution, was so effective in the formation of Khomeini's Islamic Republic that some of these elements eventually found their way into Iran's constitution (Ahdiiyih 2008).¹⁹³ Of course, this observation does not suggest that eschatological themes were the revolution's sole issues; but it does indicate that there is a strong precedent, as the Iranian case demonstrates, for considering eschatologically charged arguments as a serious component in deflecting competing political propositions and philosophies. The question that may be asked, then, is whether such an eschatological element can be utilized, once again, in the political commotions that mark contemporary Muslim societies in their interaction with the West.

¹⁹³ Abrahamian (1982) observes that "twentieth-century Iran has experienced two major revolutions – that of 1905-1909 and of 1977-1979. The first saw the triumph, albeit briefly, of the modern intelligentsia, who, inspired by such Western ideologies as nationalism, liberalism, and socialism, drafted a predominantly secular constitution and hoped to recreate their society in the image of contemporary Europe. The second revolution, on the other hand, has brought to the fore the traditional 'uluma, who, inspired by the 'golden age' of Islam, have sealed their victory by drawing up a thoroughly clerical constitution, replacing the state judiciary with shari'a courts, and denouncing Western concepts such as democracy as heretical" (530).

Indeed, there is a strong sense of crisis about the future of Iran and the Muslim world, in general, concerning their relationship with the West. Some commentators have observed that such a sense of urgency has been recently accentuated by events in the Middle East that involve Western attempts to promote democracy and civil rights in the region. These efforts have infused several Islamic communities with a renewed eschatological perspective and, more specifically, a Mahdistic zeal that transcends the ancient differences and animosities that have separated Muslims for a considerable amount of time (Ackerman and Tamsett 2009; Furnish 2010).¹⁹⁴ For instance, as I suggested in a previous chapter, interest in Mahdism has grown significantly not only among the Shia community in Iraq but also within some Sunni groups as well.¹⁹⁵ As Furnish points out, several Mahdist movements have arisen since the American invasion of that country in 2003, and he concludes that

what is going on in southern Iraq represents the return of overt Shi'a jihad under the guise of Mahdism. In the minds of the [Mahdistic] groups in Iraq, jihad is now being waged in the name of, and under the guidance of, the Imam Mahdi, who, while not openly proclaimed, has at the very least reverted from the greater (incommunicado) to the lesser (hidden, but accessible) occultation. It matters not whether the Iraq Study Group, the intelligence community, or the media believes

¹⁹⁴ Bale (2009) criticizes the West for its tardiness to understand the eschatological and Mahdistic implications, for Muslims, of some of its actions in the Middle East. As the author explains “there is no doubt that... apocalyptic, messianic, and millenarian themes are common within today’s Sunni jihadist circles, including those close to al-Qa’ida, just as they have always been intrinsic to the Shi’i tradition and have been systematically stoked since the late 1970s by certain Khomeini-linked and -inspired Islamist milieus. For an example of such themes on al-Qa’ida-linked Web sites, note the March 9, 2003 article by Usama ‘Azzam, who made the following statement on the eve of the American invasion of Iraq: ‘Is there anyone who still doubts that we are approaching the end of the world? Does anyone think the hour is far? We are on the eve of the total dismantling that will be followed by our clear victory...After this war, which has no precedence in human history and in the fight between the community of believers and the Devil and his followers, does anyone doubt that these are the days of the Mahdi?’ ‘Azzam then adds the following revealing remark: ‘I have no doubt that the leaders of the *mujahidin* of al-Qa’ida and the Taliban are the owners of the black banners who will assist the Mahdi’” (17).

¹⁹⁵ Helfort (2009) notes that there is a growing unity among Sunni organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood with Iran and Hezbollah.

this, so long as a growing number of Iraqis (or other Muslims) do. (Furnish 2010, 191)

As I also pointed out previously, one of those Muslims who strongly believe in the political importance of the Mahdi is the Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Ahmadinejad's faith on the Islamic messiah is more than a simple pietistic and passive devotion to the Imam. Rather, the Iranian leader has been actively spreading his belief about this messianic figure and systematically working to expedite the Hidden Imam's appearance.¹⁹⁶ One of the ways that Ahmadinejad promotes the return of the Mahdi is by re-evaluating and resisting religious as well as political trends, like the global spreading of liberal democracy, that, according to him, threaten Iran's role as a forerunner of the messiah.¹⁹⁷ Ahmadinejad has been portrayed as an unstable and fanatical political leader who holds unusual religious beliefs. But, despite the dismissal of his critics, the Iranian president has consistently shown that he is not only acting out of eschatological principles, but that he is also working strategically.¹⁹⁸ Under his leadership, for instance, there has been an increasing alignment of Iran with emerging democracies in Latin America, particularly with Brazil, the region's economic leader that also has, as Iran, nuclear and international ambitions.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ This observation takes on an even greater relevance since, as Helfont (2009) points out, "it is hard to dispute the assertion that the Shia will wield more political power throughout the Sunni Arab heartland than they have in several centuries" (287).

¹⁹⁷ Finger (2008) notes that "since Iran is the world's leading Shi'a power, many Iranians expect that it will play a major role in preparing for the Mahdi and in his subsequent activity. This belief renders Iranian Mahdis m enormously significant in global politics" (28).

¹⁹⁸ Ahmadinejad's eschatology "is no ploy, it is very serious indeed" (Ahdiyyih 2008, 27).

¹⁹⁹ Brazilian president Luis Ignacio, Lula, da Silva has remarked that Iran and Brazil have "identical development models." Lula, who met Ahmadinejad recently, has been helping Iran avoid international sanctions, due to its nuclear program (Ravedran 2010, np).

The resurgence of Mahdism in Iran, Iraq and in some other areas of the Middle East points to the importance of eschatology as a central doctrine for political Islam. For several communities within the Islamic world, the expectation of the coming of the Mahdi is of considerable importance, since only the long-awaited Imam will be able to effectively bring justice and equity to Muslims and the entire world. As Sachedina (1981) explains, this hope for the future coming of the Mahdi “embodies all that for which the religious experience of the Muslims stand. The basic emphasis of this experience is the establishment of the ideal religious-political community...” (162). The recent Islamic interest in Mahdism is, at the very least, a curious event in light of Rawls’ realistic utopian expectations for a peaceful world community based on liberal human rights principles, and Fukuyama’s suggestion that humankind has reached an unprecedented political *telos* in liberalism’s victory over all sorts of ideologies, including religious ones. Whether one contemplates this evolving Muslim interest as important, Mahdism may ultimately point to the reality that the spreading of liberal democracy in the Middle East is a vision for the future of the region that many Muslims simply do not share.

Hope in Eschatology

In light of the previous discussion, some may argue that approaches to political thought from an eschatological perspective are simply too controversial and inconclusive to merit attention, particularly when a secular ideology as liberalism is under consideration. This might be, perhaps, a reasonable observation. Nevertheless, it would

be a hasty conclusion and one that disregards an important element in liberalism already observed in this work, i. e., this tradition's desire to bring resolution to socio-political struggles and human alienation. In Kant's, Mill's or even Fukuyama's arguments, for instance, there is an honest and substantial interest in the future well-being and destiny of humankind. This preoccupation suggests that the eschatological outlook in the liberal tradition is, despite its possible metaphysical pitfalls, a positive aspect that may deserve more consideration. Such an eschatological tendency in liberalism also points to its essential common ground with religious traditions which might lead to an engaging dialogue among these diverse groups.²⁰⁰ Tinder (1965) has commented that concern with eschatology flows from observing "the human situation" in history and the hope in the possibility of better future alternatives (316). In this sense, liberal and religious eschatological preoccupations are not substantially different, which may allow for the building of a consensus that overlaps their interest in the global human condition.

Moreover, such a tendency in liberalism demonstrates that the hopeful expectation regarding the future of humankind is not restricted to religious sentiments. In fact, part of the everyday praxis of political institutions and policies is the promotion of social hope among individuals. It has been suggested, for instance, that "there is an eschatological dimension at the heart of the social and political organization of the human civilization which moves and shapes its institutions" (Christoyannopoulos and

²⁰⁰ As Finger (2008) argues, for instance, about Iran, though the country's "recent history raises the possibility of a militant form of Islam, Mahdism can also be invoked to encourage interfaith and international dialogue. This is because Mahdism, like all eschatologies, envisions more than the conquest of evil; it envisions the coming of a just and peaceful social order and the end of poverty and suffering for all peoples" (28).

Milne 2007, 972).²⁰¹ Thus, as Robert W. Jenson (2004) argues, in his article “Eschatological Politics and Political Eschatology,” the maxim “politics is eschatological; eschatology ought to be political,” should not be regarded as a spurious conclusion because, like in any eschatological outlook, either of a religious or secular nature, there is always a hopeful substratum in political praxis and ideologies (93). Politics, Jenson (2004) explains, “is eschatological because it deals with hopes...Politics is a society’s hoping as an activity and process” (94). And, as I elaborated in my definition of the term eschatology, this sense of hope is intimately connected with the expectation that there should be significant ruptures and changes in humankind’s history that may bring, in the future, *a new world order which is marked by justice, peace, and socio-political stability*.

Again, for several advocates of liberalism, this suggestion of an association between a teleological hope and politics is simply too metaphysical, subjective and controversial to be taken seriously. Be that as it may, this association has been meaningfully expounded by Kant, which Rawls has appropriated in his observation that if there is no hope for a just society, one may properly question whether “it is worthwhile for human beings to live on earth” (Rawls 1999, 128). But Rawls is even more forceful regarding his eschatological hope of a just social order when he concludes that

I believe that the very possibility of such a social order itself reconciles us to the social world. The possibility is not mere logical possibility, but one that connects with the deep tendencies and inclinations of the social world. For so long as we

²⁰¹ Wendland (2010) also remarks that eschatology has a “*productive significance*” for socio-political ethics (365).

believe for good reasons that a self-sustaining and reasonable just political and social order both at home and abroad is possible, we can reasonably hope that we or others will someday, somewhere, achieve it; and we can then do something toward this achievement. This alone, quite apart from our success or failure, suffices to banish the dangers of resignation and cynicism. (Rawls 1999, 128)

Indeed, there may be, at times, too much cynicism and lack of hope for the future of humankind, particularly concerning the place of liberal ideals and religious views among diverse contemporary social groups. Yet, conservative Christians, Muslims and liberals can and must do their part to promote a vision for the future that involves the realization of a more stable and peaceful global community. Their eschatological expectations for humankind, and for their specific societies, will certainly continue to differ in considerable ways, but one element may remain as constant in this interaction; the understanding that politics and social aspirations for a better future have to walk side-by-side, since politics still is an essential element in our attempts to live with hope and to cultivate hope (Tinder 1999).

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