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Paper Proposal  
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**Assimilation as Refusal:  
Violence, Religion, and History in Jürgen Habermas's Post-Secular Reconstruction**

In an interview given shortly after the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001, Jürgen Habermas argued that “the spiral of violence begins as a spiral of distorted communication that leads through the spiral of uncontrolled reciprocal mistrust, to the breakdown of communication.”<sup>1</sup> In his more recent work on the persistence of politically potent forms of “post-secular” religion, Habermas has sought to break this spiral of violence by addressing the deficit of trust that exists between a reigning secular political rationality, which has become insecure about its own normative foundations, and those faith traditions that might seek to “exploit”<sup>2</sup> this vulnerability. In order to fortify the legitimacy of a rational political order that has been damaged by the “structural violence”<sup>3</sup> of non-discursive market forces and institutional powers, Habermas has attempted to “assimilate the semantic legacy of religious traditions [i.e. “the creativity of world-disclosure”] without effacing the boundary between the universes of faith and knowledge.”<sup>4</sup>

In this paper, I will argue that this “assimilation” is simultaneously a refusal of the very conditions by which this semantic potential is actualized and that this refusal actually replicates the spiral that Habermas proposes to overcome. I will show that by insisting on a strict division between “faith and knowledge,” Habermas repeats a rhetorical architecture that oscillates between a rationally sufficient, but motivationally deficient, secular reason and those archaic traditions that remain genealogically and motivationally essential, but rationally inadmissible. By denying “post-secular” religion any discursive content, I will argue that Habermas creates a rational speech situation in which the required intervention of religious language can *only* come as a non-communicative, and thus violent, interruption. Finally, I will locate the roots of this post-secular oscillation in Habermas’s own underdeveloped philosophy of history, which defines tradition itself as an inherently non-discursive “prepolitical crutch”<sup>5</sup> that modernity must leave behind in order to “*create its normativity out of itself*.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, I will not only have illustrated that Habermas fails to slow the spiral of violence that he diagnoses, but also that his philosophy lacks the conceptual resources necessary to perform the proposed intervention.

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<sup>1</sup> Borradori, Giovanna. *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2003. pg. 35.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, 34.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, 35.

<sup>4</sup> Habermas, Jürgen. *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Ciaran Cronin, translator). Cambridge, UK: Polity Press. 2009. pg. 211.

<sup>5</sup> Habermas, Jürgen. “Yet Again: German Identity: A Unified Nation of Angry DM-Burghers?” *New German Critique* (Special Issue on German Unification). No. 52, Winter 1991. pg. 96.

<sup>6</sup> Habermas, Jürgen. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Frederick G. Lawrence, translator). Cambridge: MIT Press. 1987. pg. 7. (*italics in original*).