Postsecular History
Continental Philosophy of Religion and the seventeenth century Dutch Collegiant movement[1]

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Abstract: This study provides a particular historical reading of the postsecular moment. In an effort to problematize and historicize the claims of both the secular and the postsecular, this study draws a connecting line between a contemporary postsecular thinker (Daniel Colucciello Barber), and a group of religious dissidents in the seventeenth century Dutch Republic (the Collegiants). In order to demonstrate that the concept of the secular is value-laden and historically situated, the following will explore the ways in which an historical group shares many epistemological characteristics with present postsecular discourse.

Résumé: Cette étude fournit une lecture historique particulière du moment post-séculaire. En cherchant à problématiser et à historiciser les revendications des deux le profane et le postsecular, cette étude établit une connexion entre un penseur post-séculaire contemporain (Daniel Colucciello Barber), et un groupe de dissidents religieux dans la République néerlandaise au cours du XVIIe siècle (les Collegiants). Afin de démontrer que le concept du séculier est chargé par des valeurs et qu'il est situé historiquement, ce qui suit va explorer les façons dont un groupe partage de nombreuses caractéristiques historiques épistémologiques avec le discours post-séculaire de la présente.

Many contemporary discourses within religious studies, philosophy, and theology contest and debate the category of the secular. Most scholarly conversations on the subject now reject the popular assumption that the secular is a straightforward and unbiased category, leading to the present identification of a postsecular reality in which the certainties of the secular project are at least questionable, if not entirely untenable. Contrary to the popular assumption that the category of the secular provides a value-neutral and ahistorical basis for culture and politics, the postsecular position advances the idea that the secular is value-laden and has a quite unsecular history. For example, in his book *Theology and Social Theory* John Milbank critiques secular reason in order to challenge the idea that the secular is the default ground that underlies the accretions of religious illusion (his famous statement is "Once there was no 'secular.'") (2006: 9). From a different standpoint, in his book *A Secular Age* Charles Taylor identifies the "immanent frame" from which secular thinking proceeds – a position that does not rely upon reference to a transcendent or divine explanation of nature (2007: 15). Although he arrives at different conclusions than both Milbank and Taylor (who themselves are not in agreement), Talal

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Asad similarly critiques the secular in his book *Formations of the Secular* (2003), dividing the broad category of secularity into three parts: the secular, secularization, and secularism. This tripartite description is also employed in the work of José Casanova, who writes that "[r]ethinking secularism requires that we keep in mind the basic analytical distinction between 'the secular' as a central modern epistemic category, 'secularization' as an analytical conceptualization of modern world-historical processes, and 'secularism' as a worldview and ideology." (2011: 54).

Drawing from and broadening Casanova and Asad's arrangement of these concepts, this three-part distinction can be presented as: (1) the category of the secular, understood as a way of thinking that is or seeks to be outside of religious influence; (2) the descriptively-oriented historical secularization thesis, which assumed that religious observance would linearly decline as modernity advanced; and (3) the prescriptively-oriented political position of secularism which seeks to reduce or eliminate religious influence in the public and political spheres (the French *laïcité*, for example). These three concepts form a constellation within which the invocation of one part necessarily implicates the others. With these three positive terms in mind, we must now address the corresponding critiques that arise from the postsecular position: (1) the contemporary perspective of the postsecular, within the discourse of the Continental Philosophy of Religion, challenges the philosophical and theological concept of the secular by critiquing the idea that the secular can be cleanly divided from the postsecular, arguing instead that the two are intertwined in a 'parasitic' relationship (Smith, 2015; Smith and Whistler, 2010); (2) the contemporary perspective of 'social differentiation' challenges the descriptive and historical secularization thesis by accounting for the ways in which religion has remained both an influential part of the human experience,[2] and an important voice in the public sphere (Butler et. Al. 2011); and (3) the political critique of secularism challenges the prescriptively oriented political position of secularism by arguing for a political ethic that takes seriously both religious and secular interests in the public sphere (Habermas, 2008). Although the postsecular has taken on the same sort of indeterminacy as the term 'postmodern,' broadly speaking the postsecular names the conversations occurring between these three interrelated perspectives and their critiques.

Amidst the breadth of this discourse on the postsecular moment, the following study seeks only to explicitly address the epistemological underpinnings of the secular (the first category), and its often implicit claims to ahistoricity and value-neutrality. The following study seeks to show the significant similarities between contemporary postsecular thought, exemplified by the work of Daniel Colucciello Barber; and the Collegiants, a significant but underappreciated religious group from the seventeenth century Dutch Republic. The following investigation combines philosophical theology and historical reflection in order to remind the contemporary secular project that it may owe a debt to religious thought in the seventeenth century. Furthermore, the following seeks to show how the destabilization of the distinction between

[2] According to Callum G. Brown and Michael Snape early definitions of secularization in the 1950s-1960s understood secularization to be evident in "the declining institutional strength of religion in state and civil affairs." (Brown and Snape, 2010: 3). Since this early understanding of secularization some of its proponents have rejected the descriptive accuracy of the theory, most notably Peter Berger (Mathewes, 2006: 152). More recently, scholars such as José Casanova have argued that, rather than linear decline, secularization entails: "the privatization of religious beliefs and practices," "the privatization of religion" in the political sphere, and "the differentiation of the secular spheres (state, economy, science)." (Casanova, 2006: 7). For more on social differentiation see Kaplan (2014) and Martin (2005).

secular and religious epistemologies is also not necessarily unique to contemporary postsecular thinking, but bears certain similarities to the novel combination of Rationalism and Spiritualism characteristic of the Collegiant group. The reason for drawing this parallel across the historical divide between the seventeenth century and the present day is to both contribute to the historicization of the concept of the secular, while showing that many aspects of what we now call postsecular thought also have significant historical resonances. In order to do this I will first examine the work of Daniel Colucciello Barber who presents a philosophical critique of secular reason by challenging the strong distinction between religion and secularity. Following a description of Barber's key terms, I will describe the Collegiant group in their seventeenth century context, and then conclude with an inquiry into the parallels between the two.

Postsecular epistemology

A recent and exemplary presentation of the postsecular position can be found in the work of Daniel Colucciello Barber, former fellow at the ICI Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry and now a member of the department of philosophy and religion at Pace University.[3] Neither a philosopher nor theologian in the strict sense, Barber mediates and combines the critical vocabularies of philosophy and theology in two major works: *On Diaspora* in 2011 and *Deleuze and the Naming of God* in 2014, and in a series of several articles and critical reviews.[4]

For Barber, the secular is certainly something invented or imagined, and so his position can be readily categorized as postsecular alongside thinkers like Milbank or Taylor. However, Barber counters Taylor's identification of immanence with the secular, and critiques the ethical foundation of the "invention of the secular" because the secular engages in "the installation of a transcendent plane that, in presenting itself as a universal aim, enables the hegemony of a particular position." (Barber, 2011: 100-101). Barber's position, as it is expressed in these works, is defined by his commitment to world-affirmation, immanence, and the critique of transcendence. Barber's goal is to affirm the dignity of the world without privileging a particular way of naming that world, and thereby making a discursive power play. This formulation contains an implicit linkage of epistemology, ontology, and ethics. Barber's ethics rests on the critique of power, and he therefore evaluates ontological and epistemological claims based on whether discursive power is used well or abused. For example, in Barber's work colonial and imperialistic ways of knowing necessarily damage epistemological and ontological claims precisely because they are coercive and reductive, repeating forms of violence in the ontological register that are normally associated with material phenomena. Barber's epistemology rests on the idea that right knowing can only follow from an understanding of discourse as a dialogical process of reciprocity, rather than an adversarial model that would allow or even encourage the domination of weaker perspectives by stronger positions.

[3] Although I draw from Barber as an exemplary voice in present postsecular conversations in philosophical theology because of his explicit focus the epistemology of postsecular thinking, there are many other thinkers who critique the secular within the discourse of the Continental Philosophy of Religion. For example, Clayton Crockett writes of the intertwining of religion and secularity in his book *Radical Political Theology: Religion and Politics after Liberalism* (2011).

[4] Although the inquiry below focuses on Barber's book *On Diaspora*, his more recent work in *Deleuze and the Naming of God* and his articles on conversion contain insights relevant to postsecular moment. For a critical summary of Barber's second book see Kennel (2014).

This epistemological ethics correlates with the domain of ontology through the act of naming. When we assign a name (signifier) to a thing in the world (signified) we are not only engaging in the epistemological act of knowing, but we are doing something both politically and ontologically significant. Barber's critique of power extends to ontology through his affirmation of the world (the signified thing that is named) over and against those names that we assign to things in the world. Barber wants to ensure that the worldly thing that is named remains more primary than the name assigned to it, and this is what he means when he refers to world-affirmation (a key term in what is to follow).[5] This is because what is named is infinitely richer and more saturated than names can contain, meaning that the thing exceeds the name, and the name does not exhaust the thing it describes. The immanence of the worldly thing must always come before the transcendental discourses that tend to limit that immanence with oppressive and reductive ways of naming and knowing. The criteria of world-affirmation is applied comprehensively for Barber, meaning that both religion and secularity are deficient perspectives when they set themselves up as transcendental discourses that seek to gain hegemony over each other or the world that they attempt to name and understand.

Neither purely concerned for nor restrained by the concerns of philosophy or theology, Barber's first major work focuses on the concept of diaspora. Typically referring to the remnant of a displaced people group, and connoting a connection to the people of Israel (when used in the context of Jewish or Christian theology), diaspora takes on a different meaning in Barber's work. Diaspora names a way of thinking, a way of understanding, and an ontology, that acts as "a concept and not a sociological descriptor." (2011: 103). Barber distinguishes between understanding diaspora as a characteristic of a particular thing and as a determiner of being and existence in general, and he develops this ontology of diaspora through both a unique philosophy of immanence and an exploration of the three interwoven categories of "Christianity, religion, and the secular." (2011: x). In order to understand Barber's postsecular position it is vital to first understand his concepts of diaspora and immanence.

For Barber, "diasporic immanence" names an ontology in which "the cause of being and the effects of being… belong to the same plane." (2011: xi). This immanent ontology removes any transcendental reference point and places all causes and effects on the same level in which "each being is co-constitutive of every other being." (Barber, 2011: xi). The result of this emphasis on immanence is the tension between "namelessness" and "excessive signification." (Barber, 2011: xi). While namelessness refers to the aforementioned idea that it is impossible to assign an exhaustive proper name to particular beings or being-as-such, Barber admits that it is nonetheless necessary to engage in the act of naming both being-itself and particular beings. On the other hand, excessive signification refers to the aforementioned idea that, although names can certainly be assigned to particular beings or being-itself, these names do not exhaust what they signify. Each name is a reduction, meaning that the 'world' that is signified always exceeds the name that is signifying. For Barber, namelessness and excessive signification are related by a "reciprocal relay" that is generative and creative, provided that it does not crystallize into either the rejection of naming (namelessness) or an over-confidence in naming (excessive signification) (2011: xi).

[5] The emphasis on world-affirmation herein is more characteristic of Barber's early work (*On Diaspora*), while his more recent work on conversion exhibits a greater emphasis on negation and negativity (Barber, 2014 and 2016).

Barber holds that immanence "begins as a manner or relation… in which neither term can be made utterly prior to the other." (2011: 1). Rather than accepting a relation between immanence and transcendence that subordinates the immanence of the world to a transcendental reference point, Barber understands an immanent relation to be one in which the two terms are "mutually constitutive." (2011: 1). Instead of privileging cause over effect, for Barber "the being of the cause and the being of the effects belong to one plane of immanence." (2011: 2). Being "irreducible and autonomous," immanence expresses itself in such a way that problematizes the procedure of assigning a name to a particular identity (such as the world), so much so that "immanence, properly speaking, is nameless" despite the unavoidable nature of naming (2011: 5-6). Barber is also concerned to avoid setting up namelessness itself as a transcendental criterion for all phenomena. Namelessness is not a rule that seeks to prevent any confidence in naming, but rather it is a paradox in which the imagined or "fictive" nature of all names stands in immanent relation with the excessive and irreducible nature of the world that human beings attempt to name (Barber, 2011: 8). The two dangers of immanence then, are "letting namelessness transcend names" and "making names transcendent to the nameless." (2011: 9). Letting namelessness transcend names results in a kind of paralysis under which we stop naming things because we fear the reduction that is sure to follow. On the other hand, making names transcendent to the nameless falls into the trap of abusing epistemological power by setting up particular names as final and exhaustive signifiers of that which they signify. In addition to informing his work on Christianity, religion, and the secular, this critical vocabulary also assists Barber in his interdisciplinary mediation between philosophy and theology.

The ontological view of the relationship between being, language, and immanence described above serves to undergird Barber's postsecular position by permitting him to be critical of both theology and philosophy, and both religion and the secular. To see the relationship between Christianity, religion, and the secular through the lens of diaspora is to affirm the creative and constructive good of difference. In other words, a diasporic view of Christianity, religion, and the secular sees "differentiality as an advantage" because "if Christianity is diasporic then it can never exist in isolation from its others." (Barber, 2011: xi-xiii). Instead of understanding otherness and difference as enemies of identity, Barber argues that both Christianity and the secular must understand that what they have named 'Christianity' and 'the secular' exceeds the boundaries of those names. Barber seeks to "propose a diasporic account of Christianity without simultaneously claiming that this diasporic Christianity accords with some ahistorical essence of Christianity." (Barber, 2011: 33). In this way he avoids setting up historical essence as a transcendental reference point and measure, thereby linking his critique of transcendence with his ontological position. He writes that,

> immanence insists on the proper namelessness of being, it also insists on the excessive, improper signification that is produced with the same necessity by which being remains nameless. Any discourse on Christianity, then, should be understood as an instance of this signification that is both improper to the namelessness of immanence and constructively expressive of the very same immanence. (Barber, 2011: 34)

For Barber, being itself cannot be contained or exhausted by names. Because of this ontological claim, Christianity cannot be understood as a master narrative with privileged access to the immanent world, but rather Christianity is one discourse and narrative alongside others. Proceeding with an implementation of his diasporic approach, Barber concerns himself with the conceptual lineage "from the Christian invention of religion to the modern opposition between

religion and the secular." (Barber, 2011: 89; Boyarin, 2004). Barber argues that the Apostle Paul's formulation of Christianity under the in-distinction "neither Jew nor Greek" served to fundamentally and irreversibly change the meaning of the category of religion (2011: 89-90). Barber writes that, after Paul, "[r]eligion no longer names the practices that mediate a certain ethno-cultural existence; it begins instead to name one's relation to a newly born spiritual plane," and this plane is Christianity (2011: 90). The newfound ability to follow Christ in spite of cultural identity (Jew or Greek), means that a new category has to be invented: a category called religion (Barber, 2011: 91). With reference to Daniel Boyarin's book *Border Lines*, Barber writes that Christianity sets itself up as the fulfillment of the category that it has necessitated: "the distinctive characteristic of *true* religion is *right belief* – in other words, orthodoxy. Christianity, as it becomes a new kind of identity, carries with it a new way of defining identity." (2011: 91). Appropriate to this conceptual genealogy, the boundaries that define Christian belief in modern Protestantism often rest on the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy (Barber, 2011: 93) – a distinction that is fixated on establishing personal assent to propositional truth-statements. This simplistic binary situation, set up by the emphasis on right belief and truth against heresy and heterodoxy, is symptomatic of a deep power problem – the very same power problem that Barber critiques philosophically when he affirms immanence and critiques transcendence.

Outlining Barber's understanding of the relationship between Christianity, religion, and the secular is essential too if we are to understand his specific postsecular position. Voicing his critique of the secular, Barber writes that

> Christianity established itself by establishing religion (such that it became the fulfillment of religion); the secular established itself by opposing itself to religion and thus to Christianity as well (though in a problematically equivocal sense). I argue that the secular should be seen not as a successful resolution of these prior inconsistencies, but rather as yet another innovation in a series of inconsistencies. (Barber, 2011: xiii)

In the same way that Barber describes the Christian invention of religion (via Boyarin), he also describes the invention of the secular. Barber critiques both positions because they set up "a position of judgment" and a transcendent "plane of reality in which such a position becomes normative." (2011: 100-101). He calls this the "fundamental continuity between Christian religion and the secular," noting that, while the content of the two differs, the epistemic mode of assertion remains the same (Barber, 2011: 101). Barber critiques the idea that "the secular functions to emancipate us from Christianity or from religion as such" and instead argues that both the secular and the religious fail to provide an "immanent affirmation of the world" by virtue of their transcendental imposture (Barber, 2011: 102). The affirmation of the world that Barber argues for is a kind of affirmation that seeks to understand the world without dominating it by using names lightly instead of reductively.

Collegiant connections

With this outline of Barber's postsecular position described (with the purpose of presenting an epistemological account of a broader postsecular conversation), we can now investigate the ways in which this contemporary understanding of the relationship between the secular and postsecular bears a family resemblance to the epistemology and practices of the Collegiant group.

In the background of Barber's work are Deleuze and Spinoza, two figures who affirmed immanence well before its present resurgence in the Continental Philosophy of Religion.

Although there is not space here to address their work in detail, there is an even more curious presence lurking behind these two philosophers. Part of Spinoza's biography sees him spending time with religious dissidents in Amsterdam, in a group called the Collegiants. In his book *The Savage Anomaly* Antonio Negri writes of the importance of Holland for Spinoza, calling it "the Dutch anomaly" and praising Dutch sociability and commerce for providing Spinoza with "an extraordinary field for metaphysical production." (1999: 6). Several pages later, Negri describes the important place of both the Collegiant group and the general public sphere and civic sociability of Dutch culture, in the life of Spinoza:

> When Spinoza is expelled from the Judaic community of Amsterdam on July 26, 1656, and, in all likelihood, also from the Judaic commercial milieu – finding himself thus in economic straits – he begins, with a group of colleagues, to explore the initial paths of his research. Around 1660, after he retires to Rijnsburg, that small community consolidates and becomes philosophically important. Another group unites in Amsterdam, a religious community. Are they Collegiants, Arminians? The very definition of these terms is problematical. In reality, we are dealing with a solid and new experience. It is solid because it replicates the characteristics of a "sectarian" religiousness, already acquired from the Dutch socialization. It is new because it translates this experience in terms of the terrific experiment of rationalistic rigor applied to religious behavior. But saying "religious" does not in any way mean that this is a confessional community; and saying that this community is not confessional does not, on the other hand, assert that it is composed of *esprits libres*, like the French libertines, who were certainly neither Collegiants nor religious reformists. Kołakowski, taking up the conclusions of Meinsma, provides us with a history of this community. Among the Mennonites, he writes, it makes no sense to pose the problem of the distinction between community and internal reform. Nor (in this climate), even at the limit, does it make sense to distinguish between religious reformists and free-thinking Deists. The fact is that the nonconfessional aspect is fundamental, and it is on this ground that the various figures of the synthesis between rationalism and religiousness are articulated. (Negri, 1999: 14)

This passage from Negri's book is suggestive of the connection between Barber's world-affirming immanence and the Collegiant's anticonfessional dissent. By claiming that Spinoza's time with the Collegiants was significant for him, not just personally but philosophically, Negri implies that there is a minimal continuity between the metaphysics of Spinoza and the beliefs of the Collegiants. Given the importance of Spinoza for Barber (2011: 2-9 and 25-26), the connection drawn by Negri suggests that Spinoza's metaphysics is not free of religious influence or unconditioned by his sometime community. However, in his smaller book on Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze vehemently opposes any emphasis on the Collegiant influence on Spinoza (without mention of Negri), while nonetheless connecting the two groups. He writes:

> Hence one fails to consider the diversity of the Jewish community, and the destiny of a philosopher, when one believes that liberal Christian influences must be invoked to explain Spinoza's break, as if it were due to external causes. Already in Amsterdam no doubt, and while his father was alive, he had followed courses at the school of Van den Ende, which was attended by many young Jews who learned Latin in it, along with the rudiments of Cartesian philosophy and science, mathematics and physics. A former Jesuit, Francis Van den Ende quickly acquired the reputation of being not only a Cartesian but also a freethinker and an atheist, and even a political agitator (he was to be

> executed in France, in 1674, following the revolt of the chevalier de Rohan). No doubt Spinoza also frequented liberal and anticlerical Christians, Collegiants and Mennonites, who were inspired by a certain pantheism and a pacifist communism. He would encounter them again at Rijnsburg, which was one of their centers: he becomes friends with Jarig Jelles, Pieter Balling, Simon de Vries, and the "progressive" bookseller and publisher Jan Rieuwertz (a letter from Spinoza to Oldenburg, in 1655, evokes the pacifism, and the communitarian theme appears in a letter to Jelles, in 1671). However, it seems that Van den Ende remained attached to a form of Catholicism, despite the difficulties of that religion in Holland. As for the philosophy of the Mennonites and Collegiants, it is completely surpassed by that of Spinoza, in religious criticism as well as ethical conception and political concerns. (Deleuze, 1988: 6)

Deleuze minimizes the effects of the "liberal and anticlerical Christians, Collegiants and Mennonites" on Spinoza (presumably both the areas of his life and thought), instead emphasizing the influence of the former Jesuit Van Den Ende, concluding that the Collegiant perspective is "surpassed" by Spinoza's system and therefore unimportant.

These contrasting selections from Negri and Deleuze highlight an interesting connection, more thematic than causal, between the Collegiant group and contemporary thinkers of immanence who draw upon Spinoza. As Negri notes, the Collegiants undertake a "terrific experiment of rationalistic rigor applied to religious behavior" – what we will refer to below as Rational Religion – and this experiment produces a unique seventeenth century epistemology which is neither Rationalism, nor Spiritualism, nor a simple combination of the two, but rather a new way of knowing entirely. This new epistemology understands the inner light of truth (Spiritualism) and the inner light of reason (Rationalism) as being complementary and often indiscernible sources of knowledge that could potentially resist authoritarian state-church ideology and its dogmatic confessionalism.

And so, rather than trusting the work of either Negri or Deleuze to describe the Collegiant group and its influence, we will attend to more engaged and historical secondary sources in order to show how Collegiant epistemology bears a striking resemblance to Barber's postsecular epistemology. Rather than seeking to show a blind spot in Barber's vision by pointing out this connection, or anachronistically suggesting that the Collegiants conform to Barber's categories, the following seeks only to draw out similarities between the ways in which both Barber and the Collegiants critique the idea of the secular. By examining the critical resonance between the Collegiants and Barber's postsecular perspective the following demonstrates that not only does the secular have a religious history (which it often denies), but what we consider to be the postsecular also has historical precedents (which it is yet to discover).

The Collegiant movement

The Collegiants were a diverse association of Protestants who gathered together for worship and discussion during the seventeenth century in the urban centres of the Dutch Republic. Beginning in Rijnsburg in 1619, Collegiant groups spread to major cities such as Amsterdam and Leiden, where they remained until their last meetings in 1791 (Fix, 1991: 37). A variety of Anabaptists, Arminians, Socinians, Remonstrants, Reformed, Chiliasts, and Quakers attended Collegiant meetings, and the groups that held regular meetings were called 'colleges.' Interior diversity of membership became one of the defining features of the Collegiant group, along with anti-confessionalism, anticlericalism, and their unique meeting format. In Collegiant meetings, there

was no hierarchical leadership structure, and there were no claims to ecclesial authority (Fix, 1991: 98). Instead, members freely shared their interpretations of scripture and experience as a body of equals, speaking from the floor of their meeting halls rather than from a raised podium or pulpit (Fix, 1991: 169). Arising from their rejection of clerical authority and written confessions, this practice of group discussion became known as "free prophecy" (*vrij spreken*) (Fix, 1991: 39-40).

In the egalitarian nature of free prophecy in which everyone was free to speak, the Collegiant rejection of hierarchical leadership complemented their theological conviction that there was no longer a true visible church of Christ (Fix, 1991: 87).[6] Instead of thinking of themselves as the one true church, the Collegiants understood themselves to be a group who met together in order to be guided by the Spirit (Fix, 1991: 113).

Influenced by both the Spiritualism of Sebastian Franck and Caspar Schwenkfeld and the Rationalism of Spinoza and Descartes, the Collegiants were a small but interesting extension of the Anabaptist Radical Reformation and the Free Church traditions. The beginnings of the Enlightenment deeply affected both Collegiant thought and practice, and throughout the early Enlightenment the Collegiants transitioned from a Spiritualist theology and practice that emphasized prophecy and the doctrine of the "inner light," to a Rationalist theology and practice that encouraged the personal use of natural reason. Being a hinge between the Reformation and the early Enlightenment,[7] the Collegiants challenge contemporary understandings of religion and the secular both in their development and when considered as a whole.[8] Although they began as a religious group in Rijnsburg and ended as a Rationalist group, it would be reductive to generally characterize the Collegiant group as either secular or religious precisely because of their novel blending of Spiritualist and Rationalist influences over the course of their history.

The two major English-language sources on the history of the Collegiant group are Andrew Fix's book *Prophecy and Reason* and Leszek Kołakowski's long essay "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anti-confessional Ideas and Rational Religion." (Kołakowski, 1990a and 1990b; Fix, 1991: 17). On one hand, Fix's book is a widely-cited and comprehensive treatment of the historical and theological breadth of the Collegiant group. Tracing the movement from Spiritualism to Rationalism using secularization as his key category, Fix covers all of the major Collegiant thinkers, focusing on Galenus Abrahamsz. in the early period and Jan Bredenburg in the late period.[9] On the other hand, Kołakowski is not as well-known a source on the Collegiant

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[6] In his 12 Articles, co-authored with fellow Collegiant David Spruyt, Galenus Abrahamsz. writes that the churches of his day "wholly fail to conform to the institution and state of the first and only true church [*heel niet conform zijn, de op-rechtinge/instellinge/en standt/van die eerste en eenige kerk*]" (Quoted in Fix, 1991: 98). Fix writes that Galenus "called upon all Christians to recognize that their churches were human institutions without divine authority, and he appealed to them to carry on their religious life with humility and toleration and without binding confessions." (1991: 98-99).

[7] Elsewhere Fix writes that "the Collegiant movement became the center and focus of a highly significant development in the evolution of European religious and philosophical thought: the transformation of a millenarian and spiritualistic religious world view into an embryonic secular and rationalistic philosophy" (Fix, 1987: 63).

[8] Historian David Sorkin writes that "[c]ontrary to the secular master narrative, the Enlightenment was not only compatible with religious belief but conducive to it. The Enlightenment made possible new iterations of faith. With the Enlightenment's advent, religion lost neither its place nor its authority in European society and culture." (2008: 3). For a similar argument see McNutt (2014: 8-17).

[9] Although I rely on Fix for his description of Collegiant history, the limits of Fix's perspective are apparent in his reliance upon secularization as a key determiner of the advance of the Enlightenment, contrary to Sorkin and

group, and therefore deserves a more significant introduction. In 1963 the Marxist philosopher wrote an article in Polish called "The Mennonite Anticonfessional Current and Rational Religion." Historian James Satterwhite of Bluffton University later translated the essay and published it in two parts in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* in 1990. Kołakowski eventually developed the original essay into a book, which was first published in Polish and then translated into French as *Chrétiens sans Église* in 1969.[10] In his essay Kołakowski was interested in the Collegiants and other anticonfessional groups for a very particular reason. In his introduction to the essay Satterwhite quotes the work of R. M. Fernandes:

> What attracted him [Kołakowski] to these movements was that they were attempting to 'realize Christian values without conforming to the rules of ecclesiastical organization. They sought a religious practice which would be free from the 'visible' constraints attached to Church membership, such as credo, rituals, sacraments, institutional *sacerdoce*, etc. They tried to form a Christian community that would not be a church.'(Satterwhite quoting R.M. Fernandes in Kołakowski, 1991a: 261)

The title of Kołakowski's larger study, *Chrétiens sans Église*, reflects this way of characterizing the Collegiants by suggesting that they remained Christians without the traditional ecclesial and confessional structures of the church. During the time in which this essay was written, Kołakowski studied the seventeenth century critique of religion as a means of articulating a Marxist critique of Stalinism. Kołakowski concerned himself with "the relationship between freedom and institutional control" in the Collegiant group, while seeking to understand "the relationship between orthodoxy and heresy and between orthodoxy and reform, as well as the issues of democracy, tolerance, and human freedom." (Satterwhite, 1992: 37). Satterwhite further describes Kołakowski's interest as hinging upon the ability of anticonfessional movements to offer critique but "avoid constituting themselves as a new orthodoxy." (1992: 37). Kołakowski's identification of the importance of the heretical anticonfessional character of the Collegiants was, for him, a useful source for Marxist critique.

Both Collegiant anticlericalism and the tension between orthodoxy and heresy should sound familiar when we consider contemporary debates within the Continental Philosophy of Religion. This is the beginning of the ways in which the Collegiant group can serve as an

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McNutt. In *Prophecy and Reason* Fix relies heavily upon the movement from Spiritualism to Rationalism to periodize the history of the Collegiants. Fix begins his book by describing the cultural and intellectual milieu between 1650 and 1700. The portrait that he paints of the "intellectual transformation" of the seventeenth century rests upon the displacement of "the providential religious worldview" by a "secular worldview based largely on the foundation of human reason." (1991: 3). Although this narrative is more or less true of the Collegiants, Fix risks reducing Collegiant Rational Religion to a transitional period in the supposedly inevitable movement from Spiritualism to Rationalism. This carries with it the risk of conflating secularization with rationalization, missing the ways in which the Collegiants took on the perspective of Rationalism without necessarily secularizing their Spiritualist beliefs.

[10] See Kołakowski (1987). The translation also includes a new afterword by Kołakowski, and despite being considered an authority by Fix throughout *Prophecy and Reason*, Kołakowski's sizeable book (824 pages) has not yet been translated into English. However, the quotations below from "Dutch Seventeenth Century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion: The Mennonite, Collegiant and Spinozan Connections (Parts 1 and 2)" do correspond with sections in *Chrétiens sans Église* and are indicated as such. As well, some salient sections of the third chapter of *Chrétiens sans Église* have also been translated into English in the collection *The Two Eyes of Spinoza*, with some partial overlap with the second part of the Satterwhite translation (Kołakowski, 2004).

historical resource for postsecular thinking. In order to see more of these connections, further description of the Collegiant group is in order.

The task of characterizing the Collegiant group is difficult because of their constitutive interior diversity and because of how the group changed over time. Rather than describing the contours of the Collegiant beginnings in Spiritualism and Millenarianism and their complicated movement toward Cartesian and Spinozist Rationalism,[11] I will focus on the broad defining features of the movement with attention to the intertwining ideas and practices that and changed over time, but also crystallized at key moments.[12] Fix tends to define the Collegiants through the use of themes like toleration and freedom of thought, and practices such as free prophecy and the open format of Collegiant gatherings. Similarly, but not identically, Kołakowski's description of the Collegiant movement is most concisely summarized in four thematic parts:

> The Collegiant movement embodies the highest social level of nonexclusive religious consciousness. The negative idea represented by the lack of belief in the existence of a visible "true" church allows all of the distinguishing characteristics of the movement to be subordinated to this idea on the level of doctrine. These were (1) the absence of any clear limits to membership, allowing people from any denomination (even non-Christians) to participate in religious observances, therefore allowing a person attending the Collegium to belong simultaneously to another congregation (this was highly unusual in the history of religious groups and meant renouncing any claim to the confessional "individuality" of one's own group); (2) complete equality of the faithful in religious life and the universal right to a voice (the "freedom of prophecy"); (3) the absence of the institution of priest in any form; (4) the absence of any sacraments which would by themselves sanctify. (Kołakowski, 1990a: 270; 1969: 175)

Kołakowski first defines the Collegiants as exhibiting a "nonexclusive religious consciousness" in which there is no singular visible manifestation of God's 'true' church. Kołakowski's characterization of the Collegiants is then split into four parts: (1) open membership, allowing for people of any (or no) tradition to belong to the group, (2) freedom of thought and speech, (3) anticlericalism, and (4) lack of sacramental sanctification. The four categories that I employ below in an effort to summarily define the Collegiant group differ slightly from Kołakowski's in order to also include the characteristics upheld by Fix.

1. Interior Diversity

The Collegiants were *interiorly diverse* in both belief and practice, and so scholarly efforts to define the group must struggle with the tension between the interior contradictions of the group and the exterior unity that the term 'Collegiant' names. There were many groups of Collegiants in the Dutch Republic, including those in Amsterdam, Leiden, and Rotterdam (and each of these groups had their own leaders and their own interior social diversity). A defining feature of the Collegiant group was not only that many of their groups held different views and practices, but that this plurality was a part of their normative self-understanding. The interior diversity of people grouped under the name "Collegiant" exceeds any unified or homogenous

[11] Although there is not space here to attend to the history of Collegiant Rationalism, it is worth mentioning that the Rationalist movement within Collegiant thought was itself not unified, but consisted of humanist (Dirk Coornhert), biblical (Frans Kuyper), secular (Galenus Abrahamsz.), Cartesian (Pieter Balling), and Spinozist (Jan Bredenburg) varieties (Fix, 1991: Part Two).

[12] For more on the intellectual development of the Collegiants see van Bunge (2001 and 2012) and Fix (1989).

singularization in a name, to the point where Kołakowski writes that "the boundaries of 'Collegiantism' cannot be determined precisely, because of the lack of clear criteria for membership and the absence of a homogeneous organization." (Kołakowski, 1990a: 272; 1969: 177). The interior diversity that Kołakowski emphasizes is constitutive of both the descriptive history of the Collegiants and their normative vision. On one hand, the group remains diverse because of its constitutive diversity, but on the other hand the group is unified because of the common affirmation of this diversity. Even within each specific college there were many different religious influences, including Mennonites, Socinians, and Remonstrants. Each of these groups had their own confessional and ecclesial traditions, yet they gathered under the Collegiant name.

2. Anticonfessionalism

The Collegiants were *anticonfessional* in their belief that written confessions were a dangerous reduction of Christian piety. Kołakowski defines the Collegiants as an example of "nondenominational Christianity" who saw discussion and toleration as virtues, and understood sectarianism and disputes as kinds of unfaithfulness (1990a: 263; 1969: 167). Their anticonfessional nature both encouraged a plurality of beliefs and rejected the restrictiveness of confessions. For the Collegiants, Kołakowski writes, "Satan supports the multiplication of confessions." (1990a: 263; 1969: 167). Fix corroborates this thesis, stating that "the central characteristic of the Collegiant movement was its opposition to ecclesiastical authority and its desire for individual liberty and equality in religious life." (Fix, 1991: 51).

The Collegiant practice of baptism into the universal Christian Church was an expression of the theological rejection of confessions. Collegiants baptized their members into the universal church, rather than into a particular congregation, and they allowed those being baptized to develop their own personal confessions rather than asking them to conform to a standard confession. This practice of baptizing members into the general Christian church rather than an individual congregation was common to the Collegiants and was also practiced occasionally by the anticonfessional Doopsgezinden (Voolstra, 2014).

3. Anticlericalism

The Collegiants rejected the priesthood and hierarchical leadership, although these two rejections were not necessarily identical. Although all Collegiants rejected priests and the apostolic authority that they held, the Collegiants did have their own kind of minimal hierarchical leadership evident in the fact that leaders such as Galenus Abrahamsz. or Pieter Balling were influential personalities who led the colleges in decision making. The Collegiants were anticlerical in their belief that apostolic succession was not granted to clerics. Kołakowski describes that, for the Collegiants, "Priests were called idlers who wanted to pursue an idle life at the cost of the congregation." (1990a: 265; 1969: 169). This anticlerical attitude shows the significant Anabaptist and Spiritualist influences on the Collegiant group. Like the Anabaptists, the Collegiants rejected the power of the clergy, and "[i]n place of the established congregations they proposed a Christianity without formal church structures, a universal Christianity above doctrinal divisions and a regeneration of religious life through individual piety and moral purity." (Fix, 1991: 51).

4. Free Prophecy

The Collegiants valued *freedom of expression* in the domain of belief, which was expressed in the *freedom of speech* embodied by their corresponding practice of free prophecy.[13] The idea that one should be free to express dissenting views corresponded with the practice of free prophecy in Collegiant meetings. Fix writes that "[n]othing was more fundamental to both the theory and the practice of Collegiant religious life than free prophecy." (1991: 162). Kołakowski writes that with the Collegiants "a new type of congregation came into being, one whose essential quality was based originally on absolute freedom of speech in religious matters." (1990a: 266; 1969: 170). This principle of freedom of speech was a central tenet of the faith held by the early Collegiants, and a central point of reference for their later Rationalism. Fix writes further that "[n]o one was censured for their beliefs in college meetings," indicating the central role of free speech in both the formal times of reflection and the informal discussions associated with the Collegiant meetings (1991: 42). The ritual associated with these general convictions about freedom and dialogue was that the Collegiant groups "met two or three times a week in a church or a private home, where the members prayed, sang hymns, read, and discussed Scripture and debated religious reform."(Fix, 1991: 51-52). Within these meetings, if a person felt convicted to speak, they would freely share an interpretation of a scripture text or an experience (Fix, 1991: 164).

With these four defining features set out, and with the Collegiant's "nonexclusive religious consciousness" in mind, it is now possible to see significant epistemological connections between the Collegiant spirit and the theoretical approach of Barber's postsecular position.

Collegiant and postsecular epistemologies

Both the Collegiant characteristics outlined above, and the combination of Rationalism and Spiritualism in Collegiant Rational Religion, resonate in different ways with the spirit of Barber's critique. Postsecular thought generally proceeds from the assumption that the line between Christianity and secularity is not clear but blurry, not established by one side or the other but by both, and not stable but always shifting. Correlatively, the Collegiant group, in their definitive "nonexclusive religious consciousness," proceeded from a similar starting point. For the Collegiants the critique of church and state power entailed a rejection of all confessions, clerical leadership, and claims to being the one true church. In a similar way, Barber's work rejects the idea that either Christianity or the secular can claim a final linguistic or social monopoly on truth. Instead, Barber employs the category of world-affirmation in order to raise up the things that are named above the names themselves. This world-affirmation looks positively upon the domains of culture, politics, science, and the arts, whereas the insularity of some contemporary manifestations of Christianity piety prohibits the affirmation of these 'worldly' domains. The Collegiants resonate yet again with Barber's world affirmation because they inhabit both the otherworldly and eternal domain of Christian belief *and* the worldly and temporal domains of culture, politics, science, and the arts. For example, on one hand the Collegiants engaged in worship and biblical interpretation, and on the other hand they were involved with humanitarian, scientific, and educational efforts, and their members were

[13] Much like Collegiant Rationalism, the practice of free prophecy was not singular, but developed through the works of Laurens Klinkhamer (1626-1682), Pieter Langedult (1640-1677) and Pieter Smout (1679?) (Fix, 1991: 177-180, 111).

politically and artistically involved in the diverse and pluralistic life of Dutch society.[14]

The trajectory of Collegiant thought moved through several discrete attitudes pertaining to the affirmation of these aspects of the 'world.' Although the early Spiritualist Collegiants rejected the present world because of their millenarian and apocalyptic expectation, the middle period of Collegiant Rational Religion significantly affirmed involvement in the world of culture and society (and what we might now call the secular). Collegiant Rational Religion critiqued confessional boundaries and rejected confessions in a way that is philosophically similar to Barber's rejection of discourses that arrange themselves as transcendental measures of other discourses. Being irreducible to either of the contemporary descriptors "secular" or "religious," the Collegiant group, in their synthetic Rational Religion, combined two viewpoints that were hitherto understood to be separate. In the same spirit as Collegiant Rational Religion, Barber seeks to show how Christianity and the secular both fall into the same trap when they take refuge in transcendental claims to power and control over the world that they purport to be concerned with. Barber critiques both contemporary secular and religious perspectives for their failure to be truly world-affirming by pointing out how both proceed from the assumption that their position is the neutral ground of reality, when in fact each perspective is in fact portraying itself as a transcendent standard. However, despite this critique Barber seems to see potential for world-affirmation in both Christianity and secularity.

In his essay "Epistemological Violence, Christianity, and the Secular" Barber writes that although the work of Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder has been well recognized for its political potential, it has yet to be appreciated for its radical affirmation of the secular as the site of the gospel. Despite the fact that the term "secular" is used in opposition to the "church" in Yoder's work, Barber describes the way in which Yoder affirms the original secular meaning of the term 'gospel' as 'good news' or *evangelion*. Barber argues that,

> primacy must be granted to the secular, and that the opposition between religious and secular occludes theological truth. Faced with such an opposition, theology sides with the secular, because at bottom the secular retains—at least in this instance—two qualities that are essential to the gospel: that it is good news for *the world*, and that it is good news for people in general rather than for private individuals... (2009: 270)

Here Barber associates both the secular and the religious with the goal of world-affirmation, via the Christian gospel. Because of the world-oriented nature of the gospel, Barber claims that Christianity is faithful when it affirms the good that the secular seeks to name (but not in such a way that positions Christian discourse as the transcendental assurance of a final name). On the other hand, for Barber the secular cannot be rightly identified with reason because reason is so often used as an absolute reference point against which every particular claim must position itself. Instead, Barber decouples the secular from reason, claiming instead that the secular represents an attempt at naming the world that is outside of the language of religion.

The radical move that Barber makes occurs when, after critiquing Christianity and the secular, he joins together Christianity and the secular by showing how the true concern of both perspectives must be the immanent world. Holding both Christianity and the secular to the same standard of world-affirmation, Barber seeks to ensure that the affirmation of the world is pursued in such a way that places the richness of the object of concern before the limits or excesses of the

[14] For example, Fix writes of the orphanage run by the Amsterdam Collegiants (1991, 46). For more on how Collegiant, Mennonite, and Doopsgezinde contributed to cultural and scientific life in the Dutch Republic see Hamm (2006 and 2012).

names that are assigned to it. This concern for the object rather than the name is very much in line with both the Collegiant spirit of anticonfessionalism, and the Collegiant rejection of the idea of the one true church. Kołakowski writes that the Collegiants "have taken anti-confessionalism to its most highly developed form and do not regard themselves as bound by even irenic 'general Christianity,' but want to conduct their religious life their own way, independent of all collective names." (Kołakowski, 1990b: 394; 1969: 208).[15] This Collegiant desire to be free of names further accords with Barber's critique of namelessness and excessive signification because both Barber and the Collegiants share a suspicion of the reductive potential of naming. The opening lines of Collegiant Pieter Balling's work *The Light on the Candle Stick*,[16] serve as a striking example of this shared critique:

> Things are not for words, but words for things – if therefore we understand things aright and as they ought, by words, it must be by such as are fit to imprint the things themselves in those to whom they should occur, and then it were enough (to make known our thoughts to others as we conceive them) only to make use of such words. But forasmuch as we find the matter in this case far otherwise, and that two men speaking or writing the same words, may nevertheless have different, yea, sometimes contrary thoughts, the disability of performing this fitly by words or discourse, is clearly inferred. Nor may we at all wonder at it, seeing we know to what a perpetual change languages are subject, even such that the very words may be changed from their pristine signification. And the imperfection is so great, that whosoever should have invented them, such as now they are in use, we should certainly believe that he had little or no knowledge of those things that are thereby intended to be signified. So that if we would better express things unto another by words and speeches, we had need find new words, and consequently a whole new language: But that would be a toil and labour indeed.
>
> De zaken zijn niet om de woorden; maar de woorden om de zaken. Zo dan de zaken/ wel en behoorlijk/ door de woorden/ zouden verstaan werden/ dat most geschieden/ door zoodanige/ die bequaam waren/ de zaken zelven/ den genen die ze voor quamen/ in te drukken; en dan waar het genoech/ om onze gedachten/ zoo wy die begrepen/ aan andere bekent te maken/ maar zulke (woorden) te gebruiken. Doch dewyle wy ondervinden; dat het hier mede heel anders gelegen zy: en dat twee menschen/ de zelfde woorden en redenen sprekende/ of schrivende/ nochtans verscheiden/ ja ook wel tegen een stridende gedachten/ konnen hebben; zoo wort daar uyt klaarlijk/ de onvermogentheit/ om door

[15] The resonance between Barber's theory of names and Kołakowski's statement that the Collegiants "want to conduct their religious life their own way, independent of all collective names" is complicated by translation: "collective names" corresponds to "*grandes dénominations collectives*." Although Kołakowski is not referring to naming in the abstract, but rather to particular names of denominations, the point remains that the Collegiants were suspicious of names in a way that is similar to Barber.

[16] In *The Light upon the Candlestick*, Balling refers to the "Light of Truth, the true Light which enlighten every man that cometh into the world," and this Light "is a clear and distinct knowledge of truth in the understanding of every man, by which he is so convinced of the Being and Quality of things, that he cannot possibly doubt thereof." (n.d.). This short treatise on the inner light uses Spiritualist language while also describing the Light of Truth using terms that appear to be inherited from Spinoza's metaphysics ("Being and Quality"), thereby associating Balling with the Rational Religion of the Collegiant group. According to Ruben Buys, Balling's short treatise was strongly influenced by the much earlier combination of Spiritualism and Rationalism found in the work of sixteenth century Dutch author Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert (Buys, 2013: 368).

> woorden/ en redenen dit bequamelijk te konnen doen/ afgenomen. Men heeft zich/ ook hier over/ geenszins te verwonderen: dewijl men weet/ in wat voor een veranderinge/ de talen geduiriglijk zijn: ook zodanich; dat de woorden/ van hun vorige beteikenisse/ gehelijk wel verwisselen konnen. En de onvolmaaktheit der zelver is zoo groot; dat indien iemandt die zodanigh/ als die nu in 't gebruik zijn/ gemaakt hadd'/ men zoud' moeten geloven/ dat hy of zeer weinich/ of geen kennisse van de zaken/ die daar door beteikent willen worden/ gehadt hadde. Zoo dat dan/ indien men door woorden/ en redenen iemandt de zaken zelven/ beter zoude willen indrucken/ men van noden had de/ niewe woorden, en by gevolgh een heele niewe taal te vinden. Doch dat zou 't werk/ dat zou den arbeidt zijn. (Balling, n.d.; Klever, 1988: 66).[17]

Balling emphasizes that the purpose of words is to name things, and assures the reader that limitations and contradictions in language are to be expected. Rather than resulting in a "pristine signification," words are imperfect vessels that are invented by the ignorant and reinvented as needed. Barber's reciprocal relay between namelessness and excessive signification serves the same purpose as this passage from Balling, namely to address the fictive and constructed nature of language and its limits. Common to both Barber and Balling is the idea that the proper concern of language is the world, and that language serves the world and not the other way around. Barber upholds world-affirmation, and Balling states correspondingly that words are for things and not the other way around. If the passage above is any indication, both Barber and Balling seek to align language with the immanence of things in the world, rather than reducing things in the world to the limits of a fixed transcendental vocabulary such as those espoused in many forms of religion or the secular.

As outlined above, Barber affirms that the secular is the concern of the religious, and being its concern, he suggests that the secular should be affirmed by the religious. He writes that "what matters for theology is the world—though this is not the same as saying that theology affirms the world as it is presently expressed, given that the community of disciples is distinct by way of its nonconformity with pre-established patterns of existence." (2009: 273). Barber states that "[t]o affirm immanence is not to affirm the below against the beyond, it is to refuse such an opposition." (2011: 27). Being world-affirming, therefore, is not a wholesale assent to the injustices and violence in the world, but rather an attempt to problematize the boundary between religious names and secular names, and to show that these vocabularies overlap in both their metaphysical object and perhaps even in their political goals. As such, Balling's metaphysical views of language and the broader Collegiant rejection of confessions and orthodoxy accord with each other, and accord with Barber's critical affirmation of the world of both language and politics.

As mentioned above, Barber's critique aligns with the Collegiants rejection of any claim to be the one true church. In their early period, the Collegiants remained confident in the inherent rightness of their own position in a way that would not stand up to Barber's critique of epistemological violence. However, as the Collegiants developed their own forms of Rational Religion, their critique of church and world remained, but their toleration of different beliefs increased in tandem with their rejection of confessions. Kołakowski was interested in the Collegiants for this very reason – specifically the relationship between heresy and orthodoxy –

[17] Another English translation can be found in Sewel (1722: 688). For a discussion of the circumstances surrounding Balling's work, its contested authorship, and its relation to both Spinoza and Quakerism, see van Cauter and Rediehs (2013).

and he contrasts religious groups that are defined by exclusivity with religious groups that are defined by openness or acceptance. Proposing a refined typology of religious groups, Kołakowski argues that the Collegiants hold a unique position in the sect-church distinction, and joins in the tradition in the history of ideas of theorizing the sect-type established by Ernst Troeltsch and Max Weber. To begin with, Troeltsch's influential distinction between church and sect is that,

> The Church is that type of organization which is overwhelmingly conservative, which to a certain extent accepts the secular order, and dominates the masses; in principle; therefore, it is universal, i.e. it desires to cover the whole life of humanity. The sects, on the other hand are comparatively small groups; they aspire after personal inward perfection, and they aim at a direct personal fellowship between the members of each group. From the very beginning, therefore, they are forced to organize themselves in small groups, and to renounce the idea of dominating the world. Their attitude towards the world, the State, and Society may be indifferent, tolerant, or hostile, since they have no desire to control and incorporate these forms of social life; on the contrary, they tend to avoid them... (Troeltsch, 1960: 331)

For Troeltsch the church-type seeks to conserve itself by claiming universality, whereas the sects do not strive for self-preservation and instead seek inward spiritual perfection. Defined by their being a gathered community, the sects "renounce the idea of dominating the world." This definition is characteristic of the Collegiant group, given their sectarian ancestry, communal focus, and intentional denial of the presence of the one true church in the world. The Free Church avoidance of state control, and the "indifferent, tolerant, or hostile" attitude taken towards "the world" is characteristic of the Collegiant early period. In this case the "world" refers to the realm of the state, but also defines the more general desire for domination and control that defines the church-type. Troeltsch's typology aligns, on this point, with that of Weber when he defines the Anabaptists in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

> A strict avoidance of the world, in the sense of all not strictly necessary intercourse with worldly people, together with the strictest bibliocracy in the sense of taking the life of the first generations of Christians as a model, were the results for the first Baptist communities, and this principle of avoidance of the world never quite disappeared so long as the old spirit remained alive. (Weber, 1958: 145-146).

Again, the rejection of the world remains definitive of the Free Church tradition insofar as the world refers to the world of the state. Troeltsch's definition of the church and sect types is important because of how the critique of power begins to manifest itself in Collegiant's refusal of the status of the one true church. Like Troeltsch and Weber, Kołakowski theorizes a similar distinction between inclusive and exclusive Christian groups. On one hand there are groups who believe that they possess exclusive access to God. On the other hand there are groups who "consciously give up any claim to being the 'one true church,' and state this position in no uncertain terms." (Kołakowski, 1990a: 270; 1969: 174). Kołakowski proposes "a division of Christian sects into those which are exclusive and those which are not. In this case 'exclusive' refers to those who believe that they are the 'one true church,' while those that are not exclusive are those who reject this assertion." (1990a: 270; 1969: 174). This proposal comes just before his definitive claim that "[t]he Collegiant movement embodies the highest social level of nonexclusive religious consciousness." (1990a: 270; 1969: 174). In this context, Kołakowski's claim is even more powerful. Not only does the Collegiant group represent a significant

historical example of pluralistic consciousness, but as mentioned above, this inclusiveness remains properly definitive of the group.

In addition to the connection between the Collegiant refusal of universality and Barber's critique of transcendence, a further example of the connection between Barber's work and the Collegiants can be found in the Collegiant leader Galenus' encouragement to the church to resist the temptation, in the words of Kołakowski, to "transform itself into a monster cut off from the rest of the world, content to cultivate its own perfection." (1990a: 288; 1969: 191). For Galenus the ideal form of Christian faith is, in the words of Kołakowski, "completely reduced to moral functions, but also unrestrained as an educational institution which aspired to external activity, enlivened by the apostolic spirit but free of fanaticism." (1990a: 288; 1969: 191). This attitude, which is a kind of secularity, nuances Galenus' position on the distinction between church and world because it allows the separation of the meaning of the word 'world' into the positive role of culture, and the negative moral term of evil. This allows the Collegiants to have a positive understanding of culture without a wholesale encouragement of "godless and evil people and their actions." (Kołakowski, 1990a: 288; 1969: 192). Here again we can see similarities between the Collegiant affirmation of the world and Barber's affirmation of the world, given that both qualify their affirmations by distinguishing between the affirmation of the world itself and the affirmation of violence and injustice in the world.

To summarize, Kołakowski identifies two streams in the Protestant mindset: "the condemnation of the 'world' along with the ecclesiastical institutions, and the opening up of the ecclesiastical institutions to the 'world' by giving them a secular character." (Kołakowski, 1990a: 291; 1969: 195). Although the former tendency is evident in the early Collegiant attitude toward the world, the latter is representative of Collegiant Rational Religion and its affirmation of the worlds of culture, science, and politics. This affirmation of the world is what gives the Collegiant group their depth and breadth, and it is what resonates with Barber's contemporary critique.

Conclusion

Collegiant Rational Religion and postsecular epistemology each share a diasporic and immanent focus. Both Collegiant thought and postsecular thinking are dispersed rather than centralized or hierarchical, and both try to ensure that the immanent world remains the object of concern for religious and secular activity (although with different ideas about what corresponds to the term 'world'). Both critique expressions of power: on one hand postsecular thinking critiques the epistemological violence of absolutist and antagonistic ways of thinking, and on the other hand the Collegiants reject ecclesial authority, binding confessions, and claims to be the one true church. And finally, neither postsecular thinking nor Collegiant thinking wholly conform to the categories of secularity or religiosity, but instead each occupy an in-between space in which both categories intermingle. This demonstrates that although the intercontamination of religiosity and secularity are often thought to be unique to postsecular life, this indeterminacy and hybridity is present in differing forms throughout the history of ideas.

Beyond the particular connections between Barber's postsecular critique and the critique that the Collegiants levelled against the church and society of the seventeenth century Dutch Republic, is a greater connection between social and intellectual history, and contemporary thinking about religion and politics. Although the secular cannot claim to be a neutral category, and although secularization cannot be described linearly, there is a sense in which contemporary

postsecular concepts are secularized concepts and therefore owe something to religious ideas from the early Enlightenment (although, in this context, it would be simplistic to think of a causal chain leading from the Collegiants to postsecular theory). This debt deserves acknowledgment not only because it assists in memory, but because it reminds contemporary postsecular thinkers of the complicated importance of historical consciousness and the perpetual threat of anachronism. Avoiding anachronism when reflecting on postsecular concepts can take several different forms. On one hand, anachronism is present in the forgetting of history, and on the other hand one can be anachronistic by drawing upon historical materials in a way that reduces past and present categories to each other.[18] The importance of historicizing the postsecular project should be emphasized in tandem with this historiographical caution.[19] Rather than avoiding the risk of drawing upon historical material for fear of offending the irreducibility of past to present, and rather than uncritically paralleling contemporary concepts with historical concepts, the present study has sought to navigate the middle ground between the forgetting of history and its improper recollection, in order to enrich the ongoing discourse on what it means to be postsecular, and indeed what it means to negotiate between contemporary and mixed expressions of religion and secularity.

[18] For more on this problem see Kennel (2016)

[19] For more on the disciplinary risks of reading historical and contemporary concepts together see Buck-Morss (2009: 148-151).

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