Book Review


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Books of five hundred pages look awesome and hard to approach. The more so does this three-volume work, with its imposing title. It discusses a heavy load of social and religious thought exceeding 1500 pages—add over 250 pages for Bibliography, Name- and Subject Indexes. Yet, the work’s subtitle as well as the chapter-titles and the numerous headings in the text are appealing at first glance. The front cover-image suggests a kind of sociological plot. It is a picture of a colorful chessboard, containing in every brown or black square a miniature statue of figurines and apparently historical personae. One gets the impression that a puppet in a crimson flying robe, contrasting with the dark background and standing on top of a timepiece, is pulling the strings. The puppet is bogus. An ugly hunchback-puppeteer is not in the picture (The Manifesto, p. 380). History and society are not always what they look like. What is persistently described in so many pages is what the powerful do to society for good or ill.

Open The Manifesto. It is a workout of exceptional social-scientific writing by an uncommon author. It constitutes an account of what 20th century Humanity was like and what it continues to be. This is The Manifesto’s main theme. Its subtheme is human suffering. The fiery author relentlessly describes the worst ordeals of this span of time, the “slaughter bench of history,” the horrors of the World War II, the second Iraq war, the so-called war on terror, the sordid practice of torture, the city slums and asylums in highly developed countries, as well as instances of personal unhappiness. However, suffering does not end in despair. A glimmering of light and hope reappears time and again.
If uncommon and exceptional, what are the qualifications of Siebert’s social science? The telling features are: the author’s literary and scholarly style that combines narration and dialectical discourse; its content: the stuff of social and religious thought the author has been feeding on for a lifetime; and the ethically and religiously committed author himself.

Most book reviews track the development of scholarly content. A detached, cold overview of Siebert’s work would miss much of its qualities. An uncommon work merits an unusual review. Let us follow the main points.

**Literary style**

At times, *The Manifesto* resembles tragedy and drama writing, which owes much to personal experiences. A pertinent example is a happenstance encounter with an old Jewish lady, who got an order in April 1942 to report to the Nazi Headquarters, a huge building not far from teenager Siebert’s high school, he frequented by bicycle. As ‘destiny’ would have it, the chain of his bike had derailed and refused to get in place. Pushing his bicycle, he neared the grandmotherly woman, carrying two heavy suitcases she had to put on the walkway every now and then to rest. He offered her to take care of the luggage. On arrival at the building, a young, good-looking SS Officer scolded him severely for carrying the bags of a “Jewish pig.” The SS man promptly reported the case to the Gymnasium’s Director for stern punishment. Yet, because the Nazi director got drafted in the army, it never took place. His Deputy, a Christian-Protestant humanist, too near-sighted to fit in the army, quietly dismissed the case.

The author could have told this uneventful if shocking event in half a page or so. Instead, he chose to dramatically enact it on a stage as it were, letting the old lady with the Yellow Star of David on her black coat, repeatedly appear on the scene in two consecutive chapters (pp. 981-2; 984; 995; 996-7; 1002; 1015; 1039).

The first chapter in question (chap. 21) introduces the near-impossible question that Jewish intellectuals (exiled before the war) set themselves, trying to find a shade of religious meaning to the horrible reality that unfolded at Hitler’s many death-camps. Then, from picture to picture, the author follows, so to speak, a meandering road throughout the recent history of modernity: the emergence of bourgeois society; the ideas of the French Revolution; the rise of German nationalism; the Eichmann trial and its moral and religious meaninglessness; the production of Zyklon B gas from a pesticide invented by a Jewish chemist during WW I; Hitler’s concordat with Rome and their common stance against Communism; the cooperation of Catholic officials with Hitler—at least half of the fifteen government officials who decided the
Final Solution were Catholics (p.1035).

This is the dark abyss that a great country let itself slide into, a country that saw itself as the greatest nation on earth (Deutschland über Alles), with an inflated sense of their homeland community—for many a sense of pride and euphoria perhaps. The citizenry were unable to see the black clouds gathering at the horizon. Later, when losing the war, when Hitler killed himself April 30, 1945, when they got the news from Auschwitz and learned the many names of the places where Jews were exterminated, the people must have been dumfounded. It must have dawned dreadfully on the author what he had helped the old Jewish lady for, the more so because, at that time, he had been involved in the Catholic Youth Movement guided by the pastor of the parish with which his family was likely on intimate terms (Siebert, 1993). Surviving Germans could not but feel enormously sad and guilty, even without personal involvement. For sure, they could not have known what happened off stage. As says the author, most Germans were not Nazis (p. 1032), but resisting them would have been their own “final solution.” They had to fight.

Initially, teenager Siebert had been drafted to be part of a FLAK unit, targeting warplanes. At seventeen, he became an infantry Lieutenant. With his unit he fought the incoming tank division of General Patton north of his hometown, near Frankfurt, at first with some success, but it got almost totally destroyed and he found himself on top a wooded hill, alone with two fatally wounded comrades, who asked for a priest. Late at night, he was able to get one from the nearby village, as well as to take the old man back to his parish house. It was thereafter, when crossing a country road that a team of three SS men on a three-wheel motorcycle spotted him, a soldier without his rifle, a sure sign that he was a deserter. Immediately, they started the paper work for his execution. If his General, whom Lieutenant-boy Siebert new personally, had not happened to appear almost miraculously on the scene, he would have been shot and hanged on a tree.

This early life-and-death experience probably lies at the bottom of the author’s concern about incomprehensible violence that multitudes of people have to undergo without any fault of their own. Gradually, he understands that it is not only fascist dictators who are behind great misfortune and injustice—even in high school he developed an early interest in philosophy, after a happenstance introduction to Hegel. Indictments of political and corporate misdoing appear at numerous places throughout the work. Therefore, one understands that the author’s motivation for this kind of research extends far beyond scholarly ambition. Yet, scholarly interest too is a condition sine qua non.
Scholarly style

*The Manifesto*’s most uncommon characteristic is its dialectical theorizing. Dialectical reasoning engages both the subject and the objective world. Seen concretely, realization of sociocultural change involves subjects (ways of thinking) as well as social structures. Past evolution always affected outdated ways of thinking and social structures to be thrown into the dustbin of history. In other words, when squarely focusing on the past, one sees that specific ways of thinking and praxis are definitely discarded, or in dialectical language “determinately negated,” not in a theoretical way but as a matter-of-fact. Concrete realities, as it were, cancel each other out. Most importantly, this true-to-life way of social evolution and historical development is the basis of critical theory.

In plain words, and different from most books on social science, theoretical discussion with the heaping up of arguments and quotes from related literature, is not the author’s approach. His dialectical mode of discourse suits best longitudinal sociocultural evolution and discussion of antagonist interconnections within historical development. The author’s working definition of critical theory says that “…modern civil society [is] an antagonistic totality of non-equivalent processes” (p. 11). If there are 24 types of antagonisms as summed up in Appendix F (pp. 420-2), it means that historical, social change is not easily grasped. Likewise, how exactly change is effected, is not easily understood in mainstream sociology, which is characterized as structural functionalism. Sociologists, like Parsons and his followers, understood societies as well defined, almost machine-like systems, amenable to categorization of actors, collectivities, roles, cultural and instrumental orientations, and so on (Parsons, 1951: 142-50; [1937] 1968). Those authors ran into serious problems when social change intensified in the late 1960s and beyond. Moreover, *The Manifesto* recurrently points to the specific problems of positivism and conformism. The former reifies objective reality and the latter closes its eyes in serving the powers that be (pp. 276-9).

Yet, the how and why in *The Manifesto* are not totally clear either. The author maintains that: “Critical theory is not systematic” (p. 332). Evidently, history cannot be understood as a system. According to *The Manifesto*, history reveals itself as an “open dialectic.” The relations among antagonisms (e.g., the religious and the secular) are never closed (p. 99). Nothing is ever totally closed or fixed—neither political structures, nor forms of art, or religion or philosophy and science (pp. 452-5).

A more practical facet of non-systematic, dialectical theorizing is repetitive discourse. Blunt or sheer repetition is never the case in *The Manifesto*, but situations,
topics, themes and subthemes as well as theses or propositional formulations are partial; they are recurrently and continuously discussed. Nothing can be defined once and for always. Collective social reality resembles recursive experiences. Therefore, illustration follows upon illustration. Also, it can be said that repetition is integral with narrative discourse. It is always concrete instances of antagonisms that are examined. There are so many, the world over. However, there is a downside to the narrative, repetitive style of *The Manifesto*. It is tough to summarize. But then again, the totality of human, sociocultural reality and thought about it is exceedingly hard to grasp, too.

A last, remarkable point of scholarly style concerns quotes and references. Direct quotes are rather rare within the text. Instead, the author paraphrases what his sources say, carefully acknowledging them with many references. Almost every page has three to four lines with ten to fifteen references in brackets. Ten to fifteen lines of references are not exceptional. In a few instances, the greater part of the text consists of references; e.g., the section: “From Modernity to Post-modernity” and the following one on the notion and the meaning of the wholly Other or *Theos Agnotos*; these have almost five pages of references (pp.1538-44; cf. also 1557-8, 1568-70). To be able to do so, the author seems to have pooled them in archives, for half a century, ordering them according to specific topics and themes. Further, the importance of the referred to authors is demonstrated in an appendix, having fourteen pages of fundamental quotes from twelve ‘resource authors.’ One third of those quotes are chosen from Horkheimer and Adorno, who provided seven each.

**Content of discourse**

*The Manifesto’s* momentum derives from Enlightenment thought, a plethora of writings and intellectual wanderings of German philosophers, from I. Kant, F. Schelling and Hegel to Schopenhauer, Marx, Freud, and of literary authors such as Goethe and H. Heine and religious authors like P. Tillich, J.B. Metz, H. Küng, and J. Ratzinger-Benedict XVI, as well as scores of recent writers and philosophers. A special place is given to the Frankfurt School of Social Thought, founded by the non-conformist Jewish philosophers: M. Horkheimer, Th. Adorno, W. Benjamin, E. Fromm, and several others. In the 1930s, the latter were concerned with discovering the root causes of WWI. and of the rise of German nationalism (chap. 1). After WWII, their sole task was to express “anamnestic solidarity with the innocent victims of Fascist society, who had died under unspeakable pain, agony, anguish, and misery” (p. 961). For themselves, they endeavored to find some relief and inner peace about
the enormous injustice that befell the European Jews. Inspired by biblical, Messianic beliefs, and following a kind of mystical inclination, they contemplated the reality behind and above all human misfortune, “the wholly Other [who] appears after God disappear[s] in the guilt, the meaninglessness, and death in the disintegrating hellish world of antagonistic society….“ (p. 103; emphasis added). Solace could be found in the “longing for the wholly Other,” the nameless and imageless Divine, the Absolute, the Unconditional. Such a totally different ‘being’ would imply that “…the murderer [does] not triumph over the innocent victim, at least not ultimately” (p. 868). Its ‘existence’ would mean that those horrible cases of violence do not determine the meaning of human life.

Accordingly, religion and faith are central to The Manifesto. That is, though not unrelated, the focus is not on religions as institutions or organizations, or religious communities, or ritual and religious tradition. What is focused on, is religious ideas, forms of spirituality and religious ideals (religious ethical humanism), in short, religious thought.

As a special inheritor of German philosophy as well as biblical thought, the author embarked on a life-long quest: establishing critical thought on society and religion. He devotes his academic career to fight the varieties of extant social thought connected with forms of domination, exploitation, and injustice. Their names are the following: capitalism (as a system of exploitation), Nazism and Communism (brown and red fascism), nationalism, neo-fascism, neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism, theo-conservatism (fundamentalism) as well as positivism in science and dogmatism in religion. Those specimens of social and religious thought are not discussed one after the other. They too appear on-and-off stage as it were. The author examines them, alternatively focusing on the manifold links and complexities of socio-political, economic, as well as religious thought. With respect to religion, the author is persistently looking for ways in which it could provide clues for countering the bad ‘isms,” while at the same time endeavoring critical religious thought, envisioning an alternative future for religion. The better part of The Manifesto may be summarized as Humanism, the reconciliation of all social antagonisms. To understand the author’s primary goal more fully, it should be useful to look at the books’ overall content and it’s ordering.

**Buildup of The Manifesto**

Lengthy books usually organize their subject matter in several parts, each one with its own title. The Manifesto is not segmented in that manner. It has twenty-eight
consecutive chapters, ending with a long Epilogue (130 pages). If titles were provided to each volume, capturing its general content, the following might do.

Volume One: Prologue. The first chapter shortly introduces the status quo of the critical theory of society, as initiated by scholars of the Frankfurt School of social thought. This first chapter can be seen as a pre-prologue, introducing all components of critical theory formation. In other words, it has fifty-eight short sections on all themes, ideas, aspects, and concepts that appear in the whole work concerning thought on religion in connection with sociocultural realities. The following eight chapters elaborate on the same subjects, beginning with an account of the neo-conservative or neo-liberal economic thought that arose after WWII. Concrete discussion follows with numerous short sections of occurrences and happenings on the world stage. The more important sections concern discussions of the critical theory of religion and theory formation as such, the investigation of the earlier models of philosophical thought in order to discover ways of reconciliation between the religious and the secular, and the discussion of a new model: the possibility of foreseeing the future of religion.

Volume Two: Religion and Society. It discusses the internal and external linking between religious ways of thinking with social thought and social practices. The focal chapters of this part discuss the powerlessness and irrelevance of religion in socialist, liberal, and fascist societies. The most painful cases of helplessness of religion come about in the regimes of brown and red fascism, but liberal capitalist societies are no exception. By way of example, within two successive chapters (chaps. 19 and 20), the author inserts at various places several episodes of how early German immigrants failed in the New World. He documents the latter situation with diary notes of working-class German immigrants of mid 19th century, some of them forebears of his spouse. They enthusiastically made the big step but actually landed in New-York slums, moving from one tenement house to another. One mother of a family spent the last eighteen years of her life in an asylum for the mentally ill—the author visited related institutions around New York. The evildoers in liberal capitalist societies, so to speak, appear mainly back stage. Occasionally, they are typified in the metaphorical terms: “the acid rain of modernity,” “the idolatry of capital,” “the capitalist tsunami” (respectively pp. 253; 1030; 1033). More matter-of-factly, liberal capitalist societies are characterized by “the antinomy between the rich and the poor classes,” actual discrimination between the haves and the have-nots (p. 1101). The last chapter of volume II further elaborates on various views of critical religion, named “religiology.”

Volume Three: Prewar Germany; Reconsideration of religious thought. First, in
two chapters, the author returns to the early situation of his home country, describing anti-Semitism, Zionism, the Jewish-German tragedy, and the country’s development leading to its socialist revolution and Nazism. The final four chapters of the work recapture and reconsider religious thought and the author’s “dialectical religiology,” again with its typical, numerous sections on pivotal as well as ad hoc key words—roughly calculated, there are over one thousand of them in The Manifesto. The Epilogue is the final-final part of the work. The first paragraph, just one sentence, announces its program, a summing-up of the potentials of religion contained or suggested in twenty-two dialectical links between religion (including particular forms of religious thought, mythology, and theology) and social, secular thought (including morality, ethics, art, rationality, humanism, and personal and social problems: the topics of evil, terror, and death). To complete this sentence, the author adds: “…and the identification of what is missing in profane late modernity: God, freedom, and immortality (the title of the Epilogue); the X-experience, the Eternal One; the wholly Other” (p.1445). Follows the forever, concrete elaboration with the author’s typical mini-size sections.

Symbolically speaking, the Epilogue is the last act of a long Greek drama play with the final narration of the protagonist (the author) together with interludes of the Chorus that represents the many voices of religiously or otherwise inspired authors. All these voices express the potentiality of a relatively new religious inspiration, the ideas and ideals that are intended to challenge and conquer the impossible: the meaninglessness of death itself, in particular, “administrative murder;” “genocide,” the still festering wars of today, as well as the mostly unrecognized, inherent evil and injustices that are mediated by capitalist, neo-conservative, neo-liberal political thought. The voices also speak of hard to imagine hope. Of course, like Greek drama, the goal of The Manifesto is not entertainment as is theatre today. Greek drama, enacted in the city stadium, where almost the whole population gathered for an annual festival—lasting several days—represented the tragic dispositions of the human psyche, with which the audience could identify. At its end, there was no handclapping, no cheering (Sophocles, 1947). The author’s own, (shortened) last sentence of his opus magnum runs as follows: [T]he negation of negation, the death of death, the stage of reconciliation belongs to faith, mediated and supported by dialectical reason (p.1574; emphasis added).

The author’s ultimate aim as a social scientist is to capture the tendencies present in 20th century and those of extant societies that he summarizes as alternative futures of religions and societies in relation to each other. These are discussed in terms of “probability, possibility, and desirability” (pp. 355-6).
To interpret the author’s conceptualization of alternative future I and II, these concern what a well known sociologist describes as the “institutional dimensions” of modern societies: “capitalism, industrialism, surveillance, and military power,” which he evaluates idealistically as evolving respectively towards “a post-scarcity system,” “the humanization of technology,” “a coordinated global order,” and “demilitarization” (A. Giddens 1990: 55-78). In sharp contrast, The Manifesto focuses on the degenerative, regressive tendencies of 20th century Western positivistic, technocratic, socialistic, or fascist societies, that might consolidate and even worsen those tendencies into the alternative Future I: the totally administered society, and alternative Future II: the militaristic society. Religion in those societies can only exist as subservient to those in political and economic power.

Alternative Future III is The Manifesto’s core thesis. All three alternatives appear at many locations in all three volumes, but, as in chap. 1, reference to alternative Future III roughly outnumbers those to I and II, three times to one (cf. pp. 8, 9, 11, 12, 31, 33, 34, 45 vs. 3, 34, 54). Future III is characterized by the reconciliation of personal sovereignty and universal solidarity and a friendly and peacefully living together of all people (pp. 314-24; 354-5). It affects the reconciliation of genders (p. 531) and social classes (p. 967). It creates “the City of Being, of non-damaged, creative and happy life… living labor would be liberated from the domination of dead capital… all murderous prejudices would be dissolved…and the Lex Talionis would be superseded by the Golden Rule… p. 1031).” In future societies, religion may survive as “…a post-theistic, critical, a-dogmatic and non-authoritarian religion…” (p. 1107). All in all, societies evolve in a longitudinal fashion and religion is reinvented in the process. Before attempting a short assessment, let us focus briefly on the author.

The author

‘Acknowledgements’ at the outset of books invariably are formal statements about indebtedness to a number of colleagues. As such, those declarations do not reveal anything about the author him/herself. The case of The Manifesto is different. It has two. The initial one, at the start of the study, expresses the author’s gratitude to his family, to the student-parish priests, professional friends, and colleagues who cooperated with him in a series of courses and lectures abroad. The second much longer version is an appendix at the end of Volume One, elaborating on the initial statement. In fact, it is a full-length article, intimate in tone (23 pages). After a note on the importance of gratefulness, the author delivers a fond remembrance to his
spouse, “Margie and her good life.” He lost her to cancer after twenty-five years of marriage (with seven children). She was a colleague to him, too. Together with her, he set-up of his special course “The Future of Religion” in Dubrovnik, Croatia, which is still going on, together with another one at Yalta, Crimea (on the Black Sea). Further, his children get one page of appreciation and encouragement, three sons and four daughters, as well as his fourteen grandchildren, listing all their names and what he thanks them for (pp. 391-4). After his family, the critical theorists of society and religion come in second place for special thanks (pp. 394-6). Then follow his colleagues and students of the author’s courses abroad (pp. 397-9). Typically, the largest part is reserved for his most cooperative academic friends (pp. 399-410). Finally, the members of the student parish, at Western Michigan University, the author’s home base, receive their share (411-13).

From these special considerations and expression of affect, one feels that the author is intimately involved with all of them. One gets a similar impression from his whole work. ‘Involvement’ is the word that sums-up the author’s life that includes the joy of love, friendship, partnership, together with sympathy and deep compassion with the unlucky, or duped, or innocently killed scores of fellow human beings, he cares for with “anamnestic solidarity.” Thus, affect—subdued emotion—is not absent in the many pages of The Manifesto. It is also sensed in statements and descriptions, often using a series of each other reinforcing adjectives, nouns, and verbs. The image of The Manifesto’s author is one of a passionately philosophical as well as a passionately religious humanist, a humanist tout court.

If anything else could sum-up the author’s sincerest thought, his love and his faith, as well as the misfortune in his family, it may be “a rose in a cross.” This image surfaces at several places in The Manifesto. It originated from an inspiration by Dante Alighieri and Martin Luther, which Hegel interpreted as “the Rose of Reason, or of the Divine Logos” pp. 25; 28; 392). In Hegel, a Rose symbolizes the possibility of overcoming the negativity of suffering, transforming it into “creative negativity.” The author used the same image as a decoration of Margie’s tomb monument (p. 392). He had it carved onto the upper part of lump of brown-reddish rock, somewhat curvy and smoothly polished, which stands like a human figure near the top on a grassy and a little wooded hill-slope, used as a burial ground that looks more like a small out-of-town park area than a common walled-in graveyard. The author has added his own name and date of birth beneath the bio data of his spouse.
Assessment

For present purposes, The Manifesto seems to have nothing to quarrel with, except that, once in a while, one encounters a glitch or an over-packed long sentence containing a break in its train of thought, indicated with hyphens—dashes would be much clearer. Our remaining task is to sum-up and to sketch the pictures of the subject matter that came into view, and to shortly evaluate their qualifications. Does The Manifesto truly constitute ‘exceptional social-scientific writing’?

In a word, The Manifesto’s three primary pictures concern a painful part of recent European history, perennial religion, and Western societies in development. First, the author erected sorrowful monuments of evil, the worst that ever befell humankind, a series of Guernica-like images that stand black and tall over the arid landscape of the human mind, silhouettes of genocide-rage, vicious wars, and never ending feats of exploitation, all in the name of nocuous and mindless ‘isms.’

Second, religion is the author’s sweetheart. He fell in love with the world religions. Yet, religion as a social existence draws serious blame. As such, religion tends to be tied up with the status quo of societal arrangements and politics, obliterating its critical function. A core problem of religion is its conceptualization of the Divine. All its concepts, names, and imagoes are as inappropriate as useless ciphers. For its beneficial side, a specific role of religion is providing solace for suffering and strength in overcoming the severest problems of life: the meaninglessness of death and extreme evil; in the author’s language: “the rescue of the hopeless.” This goes by the name of theodicy. “Could God be justified” after Auschwitz? “There has been no adequate answer” at the time, “and there is none now” (p. 1017). Yet, every calamity caused by atrocious human cruelty or that occurs at the hands of nature “intensifies always anew the yearning for what is wholly Other” (p. 1020); that is, a Divine Existence, totally different from what the senses can verify or human minds can think of. Its ultimate legitimation is faith and the most meaningful action is following the Golden Rule: “Treat others as you would like them to treat you” (p. 33; Mathew 7,12).

A dual picture of society and religion comes in third place. It is the image of the alternative future III, where the religious quest and those of the secular world—including the “expert cultures”—are reconciled. The surprise is that not historical religion but the makings of society are of greater importance. The author apparently suggests that rehashing culture and reinventing societies seems to be the condition for having sound religious institutions that do not play ongoing secular games.

[T]he critical theory of society…anticipate(s) … and prepare(s)…the dawn of a post-European, post-bourgeois, post-capitalistic, post-liberal, post-
modern, post-theistic paradigm: global alternative Future III—a society which would be driven by the longing for the wholly Other, and motivated by its new expressions, and in which personal autonomy and universal solidarity would be reconciled (p. 1028).

Clearly, the author is confident about the soundness and validity of his “religiology,” as well as the desirability of Alternative Future III, but he knows that it is not likely to be realized soon, if ever. He insinuates that the ultimate goal of humanity is far-off and the road leading in that direction—along paths of dialectical evolution—will be immeasurably long and uncertain, as the results of “negative dialectic” and “the negation of negation” imply (p. 731). Yet, as did the earlier critical theorists, he does not give up hope. Just as Greek and Roman intellectuals at the beginning of the Christian era could not imagine that a new religion would conquer Europe and even parts of the whole globe (p. 1557), what is still hidden in the dark tunnel of the future, might, one day, shine on Humanity.

Could the critical theory of religion and society make a difference? Presently, it merely moves at the periphery of the social sciences, but it stands to gain for its soundness and decisive optimism. The Manifesto indeed constitutes ‘exceptional social scientific writing,’ one masterpiece among the best examples of scholarship in town. It is a reader-friendly marathon-book. Where the branches of mainstream social science and sociology are partial, either this or that, The Manifesto focuses both on objective and subjective reality, praxis and thought, the past and the future; it involves both rationality and affect, reason and emotion, heart as well as mind. The Manifesto evaluates and incorporates into “religiology” the best of both idealist and materialist philosophical thought. Guided by dialectical reasoning, it steers clear of moralizing and unfunded value judgments.

An additional important point is that the author firmly respects other branches of sociocultural and religious studies, expecting help from them for establishing the critical theory of religion and society (pp. 397-9). Also, he schematized The Manifesto’s conceptual framework apparently in the fashion of mainstream social science, outlining it in five Appendixes (pp. 414-23): a five-fold world model, a categorization of the forms of human action, a heuristic model of the world religions, modern civil society’s 24 antagonisms, and finally, three types of alternative futures. In the latter, only the definition of the religious Future III is coached in a sociologically uncommon wording: “The open dialectic of the religious and the secular.”

To end this review with a personal note, I have learned much from The Manifesto, from those three foreground-background pictures, about the dimension of evil, the
potentiality of religious thought (including the mysticism of the Wholly Other) and future expectations for Humanity. In the review, I have inserted something like a guess or two, and a few snippets of interpretation here and there that reflect my knowledge of sociology and social studies. From my own limited perspective, I would like to argue that phenomenological inquiries and, in particular, value studies could contribute to the same humanitarian goal as that of The Manifesto. Similar to the latter’s brand of social science, studying values must start from actual human conditions; it must engage both subjectivity and objectivity, thought and praxis, affect and reason. Pinpointing social evil, The Manifesto excels in sociocultural criticism. Its strongest point appears to be its multi-dimensional, longitudinal approach of study, the quality and excellence of which probably is the hardest to achieve.

Note

References