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Four epistemic reasons to consult religious traditions

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1 | INTRODUCTION

In recent years, we can speak of an anti-liberal appropriation of the concepts of religion, tradition, and religious tradition. The label of religious tradition has been used to divide and mobilize voters. With the support of the Russian Orthodox Church, Russian president Vladimir Putin has presented himself as the defender of traditional values against the liberal West (Agadjanian, 2017). In Poland, religious groups have criticized the liberal European project in the name of the Catholic tradition (Szumigalska, 2015). This raises the question of whether and how religious traditions can be addressed in liberal democratic states.

In political philosophy and political theory, religion has often been reconstructed with a focus on beliefs (Asad, 2012). According to this notion of religion, belief has primacy over ritual, which has led to a neglect of religion as an embodied way of life that is manifested in individual behavior, in social practices, and in institutions (Mahmood, 2009). This emphasis on the role of religious beliefs has also led to a neglect of the role of religious traditions. Only few authors have argued that appeals to religious traditions can advance a discussion (Asad, 2009; MacIntyre, 1984; Scruton, 1984). During the last years, however, a group of philosophers has begun to re-evaluate the justificatory role of tradition (Casal, 2021; Cohen, 2011; Heath, 2014; Robson, 2020; Scheffler, 2010; Wall, 2016). These philosophers defend the position that if certain conditions are met, traditions can, to some extent, be valuable. More recently, Bardon (2020) and Laborde (2020) have engaged in a more specific discussion on the value of religious traditions in public deliberation.

Consulting tradition is a prominent practice within religious communities because traditions provide epistemic resources on the basis of which political or ethical problems within the community can be addressed (Audi, 2000, p. 117).[1] March distinguishes between two methods by which religious communities consult tradition to address problems in their communities: an "appeal or reference to traditional religious commitments or practices" and an "appeal to

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practical wisdom or moral insight found in traditions of religious thought" (March, 2013, p. 527).[2] Following March's distinction, I differentiate between two strategies of problem-solving. Political and ethical problems can be addressed by reaffirming the tradition and the *practical values* for maintaining it; alternatively, they can be addressed by consulting one's tradition and its *epistemic resources* for problem-solving. Consulting a tradition—whether one's own or a tradition in which one does not participate—consists in identifying the epistemic resources that it contains and applying them to political or ethical problems in one's community.

Thus, people can have *practical reasons* for maintaining their traditions and *epistemic reasons* for consulting them. According to Scheffler (2010), practical reasons in favor of tradition carry the following form: "Holding on to tradition X is good because it supports value Y." For example, Scheffler argues that people might value traditions because there is deliberative efficiency in following collective habits (Scheffler, 2010, pp. 291–292). Practising Muslims might value the tradition of regular Friday prayer (*Salat al-Jumu'ah*) because this tradition can help them gain spiritual consolation without having to deliberate beforehand on what to do. Hence, the argument would be that maintaining the tradition of Friday prayer is valuable at least partly because it supports the value of deliberative efficiency. The epistemic reasons for consulting traditions that I analyze in this paper are different. They assume the following form: "Tradition X is worth consulting because there is reason Y to believe that it provides epistemic resources for problem-solving." While practical reasons justify maintaining religious traditions based on practical values, epistemic reasons justify consulting religious traditions based on their epistemic resources for problem-solving.[3]

In this paper, I examine four nonreligious, epistemic reasons for consulting religious traditions to explore whether these reasons are sound. In this way, I supplement the ongoing debate on the value of tradition, which has hitherto focused mostly on practical values for maintaining traditions, with an examination of epistemic reasons for consulting traditions. Since I focus on nonreligious and epistemic reasons, my analysis is not limited to religious communities and their strategies for solving problems by means of religious reasoning—for example, based on revelation or religious authority. It also has implications for the role of religious traditions in political or ethical problem-solving in liberal democratic states.

The reasons that I examine are content-dependent, pro tanto reasons for consulting religious traditions. They are content-dependent in that they presuppose that a tradition contains epistemic resources; however, they are based not on these particular epistemic resources but on the process by which these epistemic resources are passed on from one generation to the next.[4] These epistemic reasons are reasons that religious traditions provide epistemic resources for problem-solving: (1) because they are the result of continuous transmission, (2) because they have stood the test of time, (3) because they are the result of an intergenerational learning process, or (4) because they are the result of a moral enquiry. However, even if there are such epistemic reasons for consulting a religious tradition, those reasons may be outweighed by others. One example would be a tradition that provides epistemic resources for problem-solving but does so only by unjustifiably discriminating against certain adherents of that tradition. These cases are discussed in more detail in Section 6.

Within religious traditions based on sacred texts and revealed truth, we can distinguish between three aspects in which their traditional character becomes apparent: the *continuity* of their transmission, a *canon* of sacred texts and rituals, and a *core* of revealed teachings (Alexander, 2016; Kramm, 2022).[5] In my analysis, I focus primarily on the *continuity* aspect of religious traditions and conceptualize tradition as a series of acts of tradition in which "A hands down/transmits Φ to B" (Shils, 1981; Gross, 1992; Pieper, 2010). Within an act of tradition, one can distinguish between the transmitter A, the receiver B, and the element being transmitted Φ. The transmitter A and the receiver B can be individuals or groups who belong to the same or different generations. For my argument, I focus on religious traditions in which the transferred element Φ is an epistemic resource, such as a set of teachings of religious wisdom, a body of religious practical knowledge, a religious institution that serves as a repository of knowledge, or religious rationalities. These epistemic resources can assist individuals or groups in solving problems in the political or ethical sphere. They can provide orientation for political decision-making procedures or for handling ethical questions. Or they can help to reframe particular problems. Epistemic reasons for consulting religious traditions comprise reasons that these traditions provide epistemic resources for problem-solving, reasons that the problem-solving abilities of these traditions

can be retained during the process of transmission and reasons that the problem-solving abilities of these traditions can be enriched by additional epistemic resources.

2 | EPISTEMIC REASONS BASED ON CONTINUOUS TRANSMISSION

The first type of epistemic reason for consulting religious traditions that I discuss refers to the continuity of transmission and assumes the following form: "Religious tradition X is worth consulting because, due to its continuous transmission, we have reason to believe that it provides epistemic resources for problem-solving." The underlying justification carries the following structure:

> Premise 1: If a religious tradition is continually transmitted, we have reason to believe that there is continuity between the tradition's past and present abilities to provide epistemic resources to solve problems.
> Premise 2: If there is continuity between a tradition's ability to provide epistemic resources for problem-solving in the past and its ability to do so in the present, this tradition is worth consulting.
> Premise 3: Religious tradition X has been continually transmitted.
> Conclusion: We have reason to believe that religious tradition X is worth consulting.

When considering a particular instance of the act of tradition "A transfers/transmits Φ to B," this argument emphasizes the continuity of the transmitted element (Φ → Φ' → Φ'') within a series of acts of tradition. An illustration of this case can be found in Pieper's work on tradition, where he focuses on traditions of religious wisdom that transmit a teaching, a statement about reality, an interpretation of reality, or a proverb (Pieper, 2010, p. 9). Such traditions provide their adherents with insights that help them to solve complex moral or political problems.[6] By distinguishing between content that must be preserved in a continuous transmission and the way this content must be rephrased according to time and place, Pieper aims to answer the question of how specific contents can be transmitted in a world of change.

One example of such a tradition of religious wisdom is the transmission of the *Rule of St. Benedict* within monastic communities that follow the Benedictine way of life. Benedict of Nursia was a Christian monk who wrote this code of ethics for a monastic community in Monte Cassino, Italy, in the 6th century. The *Rule of St. Benedict* is bestowed from generation to generation through a process of transmission in which the text is continuously interpreted and appropriated by each successive generation (Mercier & Deslandes, 2017, p. 789). The teachings of the text contain, among other elements, recommendations for wise leadership in Chapter 2 (Kardong, 1996, pp. 47–49; Chan et al., 2011), recommendations for wise decision-making in Chapter 3 (Kardong, 1996, pp. 69–70; Tredget, 2010), and recommendations for wise economic behavior in Chapter 31 (Kardong, 1996, pp. 258–259). Should one want to justify consulting this tradition through an appeal to its continuous transmission, the argument would assume the following form: "The *Rule of St. Benedict* is worth consulting because, due to its continuous transmission, we have reason to believe that it provides epistemic resources for problem-solving." This epistemic argument would refer to the process by which these epistemic resources related to wise leadership, wise decision-making, and wise economic behavior are transmitted from one generation to the next rather than to the content of the epistemic resources themselves.

However, if one analyzes the structure of this argument, the first premise is questionable. As the continuity between a religious tradition's past and present abilities to provide epistemic resources is justified merely by an appeal to the continuity of transmission, it implicitly presupposes the tradition's ability to provide epistemic resources in the first place. What is lacking in the argument is a criterion for whether the tradition has actually been able to solve ethical or political problems in the past. If the tradition did not at the beginning of the transmission chain provide epistemic resources, even continuous transmission could not overcome the absence of such resources that could be retained. For the argument to work, the tradition's ability to provide epistemic resources for problem-solving would either have to be stipulated or justified by an additional argument.[7]

This ability of a religious tradition to provide epistemic resources is also implicitly presupposed by the other three epistemic reasons that I discuss in what follows. However, all three of these go beyond an argument based merely on continuous transmission. The second reason adds a criterion of whether a tradition has effectively been contributing to problem-solving, and the third and fourth reasons introduce the possibility that the content of a tradition is modified over the course of time so that its problem-solving capacities are enriched by additional epistemic resources.

3 | EPISTEMIC REASONS BASED ON THE TEST OF TIME

The second type of epistemic reason for consulting religious traditions that I analyze refers to the test of time and assumes the following form: "Religious tradition X is worth consulting because, due to the test of time, we have reason to believe that it provides epistemic resources for problem-solving." The underlying justification carries the following structure:

> Premise 1: If a religious tradition has stood the test of time, we have reason to believe that there is continuity between the tradition's past and present abilities to provide epistemic resources to solve problems.
> Premise 2: If there is continuity between a tradition's ability to provide epistemic resources for problem-solving in the past and its ability to do so in the present, this tradition is worth consulting.
> Premise 3: Religious tradition X has stood the test of time.
> Conclusion: We have reason to believe that religious tradition X is worth consulting.

If one observes a particular instance of the act of tradition "A hands down/transmits Φ to B," this argument focuses on the transmission process and the fact that the content Φ has stood the test of time under a diversity of circumstances in different temporal periods. The crucial difference between this epistemic reason based on the test of time and the previous epistemic reason is that the mere continuity of the transmitted element ($\Phi \rightarrow \Phi' \rightarrow \Phi''$) is supplemented by the additional criterion that Φ has been able to contribute to problem-solving during the transmission process. As the epistemic resources of tradition X have helped to solve problems throughout a variety of environmental conditions, there is reason to believe that tradition X has retained its problem-solving capacities.

Oakeshott, for one, argues that the art of politics requires practical rather than technical knowledge, which can only be the result of "the unselfconscious following of a tradition of moral behavior" (Oakeshott, 1962, p. 35). According to Oakeshott, traditions of practical political knowledge can provide the epistemic resources to make good political decisions.[8] As practical political knowledge cannot be documented in codified form, it must be provided as tradition. If this tradition stands the test of time, it retains its epistemic value.

Although this argument amounts to an epistemic justification, the argument remains vulnerable because there are several strategies for immunizing a tradition against being tested and possibly falsified (Schindler, 2018). An example of such an immunization strategy would be the silencing of critical voices like, for example, that of Nelson Mandela, who was imprisoned for decades because he criticized the political tradition of apartheid in South Africa (Lodge, 2006). If a tradition is immunized against being tested, the third premise of the argument becomes false and the argument fails.

A different type of criticism, which also concerns the third premise, is made by Hobsbawm (1984). According to Hobsbawm, the secular decline of ancient traditions and the rise of the nation-state have created a new need for invented traditions to establish social cohesion and membership, legitimize institutions and authority, or spread particular beliefs and values. As a historian, he has been able to prove that appeals to so-called "age-old" traditions are often actually appeals to comparatively young traditions that serve to further nationalist sentiments and a sense of unity. Hence, an epistemic reason for consulting a certain tradition is derived from an appeal to its age and the claim that it has stood the test of time during this period, even though the corresponding tradition is, in fact, not as old as its defenders claim. An epistemic argument that is based on the age of a certain tradition should therefore be subjected to a critical historical analysis to test the validity of this historical claim.

One example of a tradition of religious practical knowledge is rabbinic training that concludes with the *semikhah* ceremony, in which students receive their rabbinic ordination. Rabbinic training occurs through both formal education and informal training during internships and chaplaincy work. For leaders and "spiritual guides" to solve conflicts in Jewish communities, both theoretical and practical knowledge are required (Grant & Muszkat-Barkan, 2011, p. 1011). Although the *semikhah* ceremony was significantly changed in the 3rd century to deemphasize the role of authority (Sperber, 2010, p. 5), the ceremony continues in the form of the bestowal of the *ketav hasmakhah*: the certificate of rabbinic ordination. The resulting religious tradition of rabbinic training and rabbinic ordination was once limited to male students but was opened to female students in 1972 when the first Reform woman rabbi, Sally Priesand, was ordained by a theological seminary (Laznow, 2014, p. 98).[9] A justification of consulting this tradition by an appeal to the test of time would assume the following form: "The tradition of rabbinic training and ordination is worth consulting because, due to the test of time, we have reason to believe that it provides epistemic resources for problem-solving." This epistemic argument would again refer to the process by which a specific epistemic resource—in this case study, religious practical knowledge—is passed on from generation to generation. To test whether this argument is sound, one would need to examine whether this tradition was immunized at any point and subject it to critical historical analysis. Such an examination would include an effort to identify possible opponents of this tradition who have been silenced or to detect discontinuities that might represent a rupture in this tradition.

4 | EPISTEMIC REASONS BASED ON INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING PROCESSES

A third type of epistemic reason for consulting religious traditions focuses on tradition as an intergenerational learning process. It assumes the following form: "Religious tradition X is worth consulting because, due to an intergenerational learning process, we have reason to believe that it provides epistemic resources for problem-solving."

> Premise 1: If a religious tradition is the result of an intergenerational learning process, we have reason to believe that there is continuity between the tradition's past and present abilities to provide epistemic resources to solve problems.
>
> Premise 2: If there is continuity between a tradition's ability to provide epistemic resources for problem-solving in the past and its ability to do so in the present, this tradition is worth consulting.
>
> Premise 3: Religious tradition X is the result of an intergenerational learning process.
>
> Conclusion: We have reason to believe that religious tradition X is worth consulting.

According to Heath, there are certain complex social problems for which problem-solving cannot rely on the reasoning of one person or one generation alone but should rely on tradition as a "cumulative learning process" (Heath, 2014, p. 87). In society, it is often difficult to identify causal connections, and the outcomes of an intervention remain to a certain extent unpredictable and can only be observed in the long run. Hence, it is unwise to restrict oneself to the limited and unreliable dataset of the current generation. Instead, social interventions must consider the existing institutions that have been developing as a series of small adjustments to environmental challenges. Heath advises policymakers to resort to such traditions of institutions to make the best use of the available epistemic resources.[10]

Again, this argument can be illustrated by observing a particular instance of the act of tradition "A hands down/transmits Φ to B," in which the active modification of content Φ by transmitter A and receiver B is emphasized. Over the course of various generations, the transmitters and receivers of a specific tradition learn from one another and modify content Φ accordingly so that the tradition retains its problem-solving capacities or is even enriched by additional epistemic resources. While the previous epistemic reason focused on the test of time and the question of whether content Φ has been able to contribute to problem-solving through time, this epistemic reason stresses the modification of content Φ by transmitters and receivers to ensure its problem-solving capacities.

An important presupposition of this argument (in particular, its first and its third premise) is that human beings can learn from one another in the course of history. Popper has dubbed the tradition of criticizing traditions and learning from past mistakes a "second-order tradition" (Popper, 1989, p. 127). Kitcher, however, indicates the possibility that the problem background may change so that traditional solutions are no longer applicable (Kitcher, 2011, p. 221). In this case, solutions to ethical or political problems that have worked in the past may no longer fit the present context. An example of this situation is the biblical tradition of "an eye for an eye." Having experienced the atrocities of blood feuds, people learned to restrict conflicts to the affected parties. When conflicts were settled by the affected parties, further bloodshed was prevented, and the families of the affected individuals could be protected. Nonetheless, the brute sense of retaliation that underlies "an eye for an eye" is no longer compatible with our modern understanding of law and justice. Since the problem background has changed, one can no longer resort to this biblical tradition to solve contemporary complex social problems.

Heath is aware of this problem and merely defends the position that *some* traditions are worth consulting. The fact that a certain tradition is the result of a cumulative learning process provides a pro tanto reason to resort to this tradition if social problems become increasingly complex. Heath designates the limitations of this pro tanto reason in the following way: "In some respect, tradition may be the accumulation of generations of wisdom, but in other respects it may simply be the accumulation of generations of prejudice" (Heath, 2014, p. 108). The epistemic justification of a certain tradition by appealing to an underlying learning process can only be applied to a subset of traditions that one has reasons to believe are the outcome of cumulative learning processes and that emerged under background conditions relevantly similar to our contemporary ones.

One example of a tradition of a religious institution is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was established in South Africa after the end of apartheid in 1995. The TRC included religious organizations in the faith committee hearings and applied Christian traditions of conflict resolution and reconciliation (Shore & Kline, 2006, p. 328). Furthermore, the TRC resorted to the epistemic resources embedded in these traditions and explicitly encouraged religious narratives for truth-telling (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998, pp. 110−114). In 2000, the TRC was officially replaced by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation. A justification for consulting this tradition through an appeal to intergenerational learning processes would assume the following form: "The tradition of the TRC is worth consulting because, due to intergenerational learning processes, we have reason to believe that it provides epistemic resources for problem-solving." According to this epistemic argument, the mere process by which a specific epistemic resource such as the TRC is transferred from one generation to the next (and is modified by successive generations) can guarantee that its problem-solving capacities will be preserved or even enriched. To test whether this argument is sound, one would need to examine whether this tradition can be considered the outcome of a cumulative learning process and whether the background conditions of this tradition's past are relevantly similar to contemporary ones.

5 | EPISTEMIC REASONS BASED ON MORAL ENQUIRY

The fourth and final type of epistemic reason for consulting religious traditions is a variant of the previous type but conceptualizes tradition as moral enquiry.[11] The concept of moral enquiry implies a specific understanding of tradition as "an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 222). While Heath leaves it open whether a particular tradition embodies an accumulation of learning experiences or not, MacIntyre proposes a thick conception of tradition as moral enquiry and recommends that communities should become aware of their traditional embeddedness and participate in developing their traditions. He advocates this acknowledgment of communal tradition because, by self-consciously participating in a communal tradition, the members of a community can develop their communal rationality. According to MacIntyre, rationality is a "practice, analogous to a craft, that may improve through the generations that adhere to

a tradition of enquiry" (Lutz, 2004, p. 3). Based on MacIntyre's thick conception of tradition as moral enquiry, a fourth epistemic reason for consulting religious traditions can be formulated:

> Premise 1: If a religious tradition is embedded within a moral enquiry, we have reason to believe that there is continuity between the tradition's past and present abilities to provide epistemic resources to solve problems.
>
> Premise 2: If there is continuity between a tradition's ability to provide epistemic resources for problem-solving in the past and its ability to do so in the present, this tradition is worth consulting.
>
> Premise 3: Religious tradition X is embedded within a moral enquiry.
>
> Conclusion: We have reason to believe that religious tradition X is worth consulting.

If one considers a particular instance of the act of tradition "A hands down/transmits Φ to B," the argument focuses on the community in which transmitter A and receiver B are members. The epistemic justification is then derived from the participation of transmitter A and receiver B in a shared tradition of moral enquiry where they can learn from each other and modify content Φ accordingly and in this way guarantee that the underlying tradition retains its problem-solving capacities or is even enriched by additional epistemic resources. MacIntyre provides the example of an idealized version of the Thomist tradition, in which scholars learn from their predecessors by interpreting and rein-terpreting them to perfect the philosophical framework of this tradition (MacIntyre, 1990, pp. 65–66, 127–128).[12] In this way, they form a scholarly community whose members participate in a shared tradition of moral enquiry through which the problem-solving capacities of the Thomist tradition can be retained or even extended.

This fourth epistemic reason for consulting traditions rests on two presuppositions, the first of which is similar to Heath's presupposition above, except that it is formulated from a tradition-immanent perspective—as, indeed, the second one is as well.[13] The first presupposition is that human beings can learn from one another within a tradition of moral enquiry and in this way engage in intergenerational learning. The second presupposition is that the practition-ers of a tradition manage to overcome epistemological crises by integrating additional epistemic resources.[14] As both presuppositions are formulated from a tradition-immanent perspective, the corresponding epistemic reason for con-sulting traditions requires translation if it is presented in a multireligious or multitraditional context. Such a translation does not necessarily have to follow the paradigm that religious reasons must be translated into an allegedly "neutral" vocabulary. It could also be based on exploring whether there is partial mutual intelligibility between religions and traditions on the basis of which mutual translation could be facilitated (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 10; Waldron, 2012).[15] However, MacIntyre's thick conception of moral enquiry raises an additional problem because it opens a space for com-munal traditions whose adherents do not acknowledge their own traditional character or their epistemic resources so that these traditions cannot fulfil their potential as traditions of moral inquiry.

One tradition that MacIntyre criticizes is that of liberalism, which began "as a repudiation of tradition in the name of abstract, universal principles of reason" but which has been unable "to bring its debate on the nature and context of those universal principles to a conclusion" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 349). MacIntyre's critique of liberalism appears to com-mit him to the claim that premise 1 does not apply to the tradition of liberalism: Although liberalism is a tradition that is embedded within a moral enquiry, its adherents have failed to acknowledge this embeddedness and continue this moral enquiry. This has resulted in a discontinuity between liberalism's past and present abilities to solve problems, so that its ability to solve contemporary problems has become doubtful.

However, MacIntyre's analysis of the tradition of liberalism is challenged by Stout. Stout criticizes MacIntyre's claim that liberalism has been unable to solve moral problems and accuses MacIntyre of having restricted his examples of liberalism's failure to debates about war, abortion, and economic injustice. Opposing MacIntyre, Stout argues that lib-eralism has been able to provide epistemic resources to address normative questions, such as slavery, female voting, and racial separation, among other issues (Stout, 2005, p. 123). In addition, Allen points out that MacIntyre's critique of the liberal position offers no convincing explanation for how the first liberals who conceived of themselves as repu-diating tradition succeeded in establishing a system of moral enquiry that would later become a tradition on its own (Allen, 1997, p. 517).

Based on Stout's and Allen's critiques, I conclude that MacIntyre's thick conception of moral enquiry is problematic to the extent that it does not fully acknowledge the epistemic resources of the tradition of liberalism. However, it would still be possible to reformulate the above argument with a *thin* conception of moral enquiry. Although the argument would no longer provide a critique of the tradition of liberalism, it would offer an epistemic reason for consulting traditions—and by extension, religious traditions—based on a *thin* conception of moral enquiry as a cumulative and intergenerational learning process where the problem-solving capacities of a tradition are preserved or even enriched by additional epistemic resources. This fourth epistemic reason for consulting religious traditions would amount to a reformulation of the third epistemic reason from a tradition-immanent perspective.

One example of a tradition of religious rationality is the tradition of application and interpretation of *Sharia*. According to Asad, Islam, in general, is best conceptualized as a "discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the Hadith" (Asad, 2009, p. 20). Iqtidar (2016) demonstrates how this discursive character can be extended to the various ways in which *Sharia* is preserved, modified, and applied. She distinguishes between "method" (i.e., particular ways of application, argumentation, interpretation, and justification) and "sensibility" (i.e., the inclusion of diverse philosophical approaches and the corresponding subjectivities) and argues that modern Islamic thought aims to achieve the perfect balance between the two in order to provide normative guidance to Muslim communities (Iqtidar, 2016, p. 425).[16] A justification of consulting this tradition by an appeal to the moral enquiry would consequently assume the following form: "The tradition of application and interpretation of *Sharia* is worth consulting because, due to moral enquiry, we have reason to believe that it provides epistemic resources for problem-solving." According to this epistemic argument, the process of moral enquiry would ensure that the epistemic resources in the religious rationality involved in the application and interpretation of *Sharia* are preserved or even enriched. To test whether this argument is sound, the practitioners of this tradition would need to examine whether this tradition can actually be considered the outcome of a moral enquiry and whether they have successfully managed to overcome epistemological crises by integrating additional epistemic resources.

6 | RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AND THEIR EPISTEMIC RESOURCES IN THE PUBLIC DEBATE

To date, the academic discussion of the role of religion in public deliberation has mostly focused on religious reasons. Consequently, scholars have addressed the question of whether religious reasons should be translated into secular reasons (Habermas, 2008; Weithman, 2002), the question of whether the justification of religious reasons is shareable by nonreligious citizens (Rawls, 1987) or accessible to state officials (Laborde, 2017), or whether there is at least a convergence between religious and nonreligious citizens, in which both parties agree to a certain justification even though their agreement is based on radically different ontological commitments (Vallier, 2011). But even if religious reasons qua *religious* reasons are translated, shareable, accessible, or at least agreed to, they could still be assessed as religious reasons qua *tradition-based* reasons. This is why an account of the role of religious reasons in public deliberation should also include an account of religious reasons qua *tradition-based* reasons.

A possible objection to such an account could be that the mere evaluation of appeals to tradition in terms of their soundness and the factual accuracy of their premises would be unable to identify harmful appeals to tradition, such as the argument that same-sex couples should not be allowed to marry because traditionally marriage has been defined as the union of a man and a woman (Bardon, 2020, pp. 24—27). However, my proposal in this paper is in line with Laborde's argument that public deliberation about such appeals to tradition is both possible and necessary before they can be used to publicly justify state policies (Laborde, 2020, pp. 121—123). The epistemic reasons for consulting religious traditions that I have analyzed above are content-dependent, pro tanto reasons, and can therefore be outweighed by other reasons. These other reasons would no longer focus on whether there is continuity between the problem-solving capacities of a religious tradition in the past and in the present but would be based on its normative aspects, which are often codified in a canon of sacred texts and rituals or in a core of revealed teachings.

For example, if a religious tradition excludes certain persons from the production or application of religious wisdom or religious practical knowledge because of their gender, race, or religion, this epistemic injustice may be a reason not to consult that tradition (Fricker, 2007). Consulting religious traditions in the context of liberal democratic states presupposes that the corresponding epistemic resources can be criticized based on those values that are required for public deliberation.[17] While I highly doubt that the tradition of opposite-sex marriage can be said to have stood the test of time or can be considered the outcome of an intergenerational learning process or a moral enquiry, an argument based on this tradition against extending marriage to same-sex couples would still have to undergo the scrutiny of public deliberation before it can be used to justify state policies that aim at political or ethical problem-solving.

In the previous four sections, I have provided four case studies in which religious traditions can provide epistemic resources for political and ethical problem-solving. These epistemic resources can be valuable for problem-solving within religious communities as well as for problem-solving within liberal democratic states. Traditions of religious wisdom, such as the *Rule of St. Benedict*, can provide guidelines for wise leadership, wise decision-making, and wise economic behavior inside and outside monastic communities. Traditions of religious practical knowledge, such as rabbinic training and ordination, can inspire leadership training aimed at conflict resolution inside and outside Jewish communities. Traditions of religious institutions, such as the TRC, can help to develop similar institutions for reconciliation in both religious and nonreligious contexts. Additionally, adherents of traditions of religious rationality, such as the tradition of application and interpretation of *Sharia*, can engage in dialogue with other adherents of traditions of legal application and interpretation in both the religious and secular spheres. An exclusivist secularist position that excludes religious traditions from public debate on principle would therefore unnecessarily limit the set of epistemic resources for problem-solving in liberal democratic states (Bader, 2013). A possible institutional setting for the consultation of religious traditions could be a deliberative forum that is acceptable and accessible to representatives of both religious and nonreligious traditions who have been commissioned to address political and ethical problems. The task of this deliberative forum would be not to evaluate whether the epistemic resources of nonreligious traditions are more valuable than the epistemic resources of religious traditions, or vice versa, but rather to create a toolbox for political and ethical problem-solving that encompasses a wide variety of epistemic resources.[18]

This toolbox approach would require a nondogmatic epistemic attitude from representatives of both religious and nonreligious traditions. For example, in the case of traditions of religious wisdom and their problem-solving capacities for leadership, decision-making, and economic behavior, it would be important that religious wisdom is not interpreted as being directly derived from revealed truth but is considered one among many epistemic resources. Otherwise, the discussion would quickly revert to the question of whether a particular tradition of religious wisdom is the only and true way to organize leadership, decision-making procedures, and economic behavior. In the same way, representatives of nonreligious traditions who advocate organizational psychological accounts of leadership would need to remain open to the possibility that wisdom traditions can enrich their perspectives.

Finally, I would like to add that epistemic reasons for consulting religious traditions do not support the recognition of these religious traditions, nor are they arguments for maintaining them. The four epistemic reasons that I have analyzed could therefore be accused of epistemological extractivism, where the value of religious communities is reduced to that of their epistemic resources. One example is the tradition of the South African TRC, which emerged in a context in which religious arguments formed a large part of the public debate. This tradition would be consulted not because of its religious content but rather because of the epistemic resources that it contains. However, epistemological extractivism is not necessarily implied by the four epistemic reasons of this paper, as they remain open to supplementation by further reasons for the recognition and continuation of religious traditions.

7 | CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have supplemented the ongoing debate on the value of traditions with a systematic examination of nonreligious, epistemic reasons for consulting religious traditions. Epistemic reasons for consulting a religious tradition

are reasons one has for believing that there is continuity between a tradition's ability to provide epistemic resources for problem-solving in the past and its ability to do so in the present. I have distinguished between four epistemic reasons for assuming such a continuity (1) based on continuous transmission, (2) based on the test of time, (3) based on an intergenerational learning process, and (4) based on a moral enquiry. While an epistemic justification of consulting a tradition based on its continuous transmission remains incomplete, epistemic justifications based on the test of time, an intergenerational learning process, or moral enquiry are possible and can, if certain conditions are met, be considered pro tanto reasons in support of consulting certain religious traditions. As these epistemic justifications are nonreligious, they can also be considered pro tanto reasons for consulting religious traditions and the epistemic resources they provide in public debates in the context of liberal democratic states. Consultation of religious traditions can therefore also form part of deliberation in liberal democratic states so that religious tradition need not be left to the aims and agendas of anti-liberal politicians and thinkers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Apart from tradition, Audi lists scripture, nonscriptural religious authority, religious experience, and natural theology as possible sources for addressing political and ethical problems within one's community (Audi, 2000, p. 117). The point of reference for his reflections is the Hebrew-Christian tradition.

[2] In the following sections, I bracket the question of how religious communities justify their appeal to traditional religious commitments, practices, practical wisdom, or moral insights (e.g., based on revelation or religious authority). The different ways in which religious and secular communities justify their appeals to tradition are addressed in Section 6, in which I will also refer to the brief debate between Bardon (2020) and Laborde (2020) on this topic.

[3] The ability to solve problems can be considered a practical value, but the specific contribution of religious traditions to problem-solving remains epistemic.

[4] The epistemic reasons that I discuss in this paper are therefore reasons that refer to religious traditions not in terms of their religious content (religious traditions qua *religion*) but rather in terms of their character as traditions that contain epistemic resources (religious traditions qua *tradition*).

[5] The case studies in this paper are drawn from the Islamic, Jewish, and Christian traditions. These three religious traditions share a focus on a specific religious book (Qur'an, Torah, and Bible), although they relate to it in different ways (Brague, 2015, p. 99). The results of my argumentation are not necessarily limited to these three religions but can also be applied to other religions that contain traditional religious wisdom, practical knowledge, institutions, or rationalities that could be considered epistemic resources.

[6] However, Pieper's reconstruction of tradition also has problematic aspects. He argues, among other things, that the concept of tradition should be limited only to those traditions that contain truth claims that are not rationally accessible (Pieper, 2010, pp. 17–18). According to this rather narrow conception of tradition, a truth that can be rationally justified loses its traditional character because the receiver no longer depends on the transmitter to appropriate it.

[7] Such an additional argument could, for example, consist of a narrative account of how the *Rule of St. Benedict* has contributed to problem-solving within Benedictine communities in the past.

[8] From *On Human Conduct* (1975) onward, Oakeshott drops the term "tradition" because it seems inadequate for what he wants to express and introduces instead the more generic term "practice" (Alexander, 2012, p. 33).

[9] However, the ordination of female rabbis is still controversial among many Orthodox Jews (Golinkin, 2011, p. 59). While the extension of rabbinic training and ordination to women was a significant change in the underlying tradition, this change affected the epistemic resources of that tradition only insofar as women also became bearers of knowledge.

[10] Scheffler makes a similar point when he refers to the wisdom of a tradition, which "may be regarded as a repository of experience" (Scheffler, 2010, p. 292).

[11] A fifth candidate for an epistemic reason for consulting religious traditions would have been the Hegelian notion of recollection. Brandom describes recollection as the crafting of a retrospective narrative "that rationally reconstructs an idealized expressively progressive trajectory through previous changes of view that culminates in the view being endorsed after the repair of the most recently discovered anomaly" (Brandom, 2019, p. 680). However, I decided not to include the method of recollection, as it emphasizes the *reconstruction* of a tradition by the recollector rather than the transmission of a tradition and its epistemic resources from transmitter to receiver.

[12] However, such an idealized version of the Thomist tradition does not necessarily preclude conflict and controversy as MacIntyre demonstrates in his detailed reconstruction of the varied history of Thomism (MacIntyre, 1990, pp. 58–81).

[13] Note that the following two presuppositions are based on MacIntyre's thick conception of tradition as moral enquiry but do not fully incorporate his insights into how communal learning and epistemological crises are deeply connected to a community's rationality, tradition, narrative, and self-knowledge. The reason for this is that MacIntyre's philosophical project is concerned not so much with the question of whether one should consult traditions but more with the question of whether one should acknowledge and engage with one's own tradition.

[14] An epistemological crisis occurs when a tradition is "no longer able to solve the problems that it has set for itself" (Lott, 2002, p. 320). This tradition-immanent formulation that a tradition can no longer solve emerging problems with the epistemic resources at its disposal corresponds to Kitcher's external diagnosis that the problem background of a tradition has changed.

[15] The debate over whether translating religious reasons is primarily a duty of religious agents is partly based on the claim that religious reasons rest on metaphysical premises that are not fully intelligible to outsiders (Sikka, 2016, p. 96). However, this assertion of mutual unintelligibility should not be set a priori but should remain open to contestation and the possibility of dialogue.

[16] Kelsay expresses a similar judgment by describing *Sharia* reasoning as involving "a balance between continuity and creativity" (Kelsay, 2007, p. 73).

[17] Public deliberation requires that each member of a religious tradition should, in principle, be allowed to participate in their tradition, represent it, and deliberate about it independent of their gender, race, or religion. Hence, the nonreligious tradition of the public could be critiqued on the same grounds if it excludes some of its members from the production or application of epistemic resources based on gender, race, or religion or does not allow them to represent their tradition and deliberate about it.

[18] Such a forum could also mitigate the fear of some religious communities that liberal democratic politics will ultimately lead to an exclusion of religious claims from public deliberation (Bailey & Driessen, 2017, p. 236). For a critical view on establishing further political institutions in mono-religious contexts, see Rudas (2020).

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