

*Michael Hochgeschwender*

## The Scopes Trial in the Context of Competing Modernity Discourses

On July 21, 1925, one of the most famous criminal trials in American legal history came to an end. In contrast to the celebrated “trial of the century” one year earlier against Nathan F. Leopold Jr. and Richard A. Loeb, this time the case concerned not the perfect murder but the rather simple question, at least at first sight, whether or not a biology teacher in the state of Tennessee was entitled to present Darwin’s theory of evolution to his students. Nevertheless, for many contemporaries these two trials, the Leopold and Loeb trial in Chicago and the “Monkey Trial” of John T. Scopes in Dayton, Tennessee, were connected to each other. This was not only because lawyer Clarence Darrow was a central actor in both courtrooms, but also because both trials enjoyed considerable echoes in the media<sup>1</sup>. Both cases were later adapted into hit films: Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rope* from 1948 and *Inherit the Wind*, starring Spencer Tracy, from 1955. In Dayton, more than 120 journalists were present, expecting the biggest trial since Jesus Christ’s crucifixion, as one observer explained. Altogether, nearly 5,000 people over seven days filled the courtroom of a place with just 1,800 inhabitants<sup>2</sup>.

Above all, these trials sent a message to conservative Americans who still identified with bourgeois, Victorian values inherited from the nineteenth century<sup>3</sup>. Obviously this world, which they already looked upon as the “good old times”, was in decline during the stormy decade after the end of World War I<sup>4</sup>. Immorality and lawlessness, bound up with atheism and relativism, seemed to be out of control<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Donald McRae*, *The Great Trials of Clarence Darrow: The Landmark Cases of Leopold and Loeb, John T. Scopes, and Ossian Sweet* (New York 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise stated, this essay relies on three recent studies of the Scopes Trial: *Paul K. Conkin*, *When All the Gods Trembled: Darwinism, Scopes, and American Intellectuals* (Lanham 1998); *Edward J. Larson*, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (New York 1997); *Jeffrey P. Moran*, *The Scopes Trial: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Among many introductions to popular Victorian values: *Louise L. Stephenson*, *The Victorian Homefront: American Thought and Culture, 1860–1880* (Ithaca 2001); *Thomas J. Schlereth*, *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876–1915* (New York 1992); *Joe Creech*, *Righteous Indignation: Religion and the Populist Revolt* (Urbana 2006).

<sup>4</sup> General studies of the period include: *Jackson Lears*, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877–1920* (New York 2009); *John Whiteclay Chambers II*, *The Tyranny*

On the other side, liberal Americans used the media publicity generated by these two episodes to articulate their positions regarding the death penalty and especially regarding the need to free science from religious and other dictates<sup>6</sup>. Over the long run, the Scopes Trial was more consequential than Chicago's version of the trial of the century; its influence continued into the twenty-first century. The court found the accused teacher, Scopes, guilty and sentenced him to the minimum fine of \$100 under the Butler Act of March 1925. But in the country's metropolises, the trial was celebrated as a symbolic victory for liberal, progressive, intellectual, and tolerant urbanity over the bigoted and backward fanaticism of superstitious country folk and their obscurantist way of life, which was in any case doomed to defeat. All participants in the trial contributed their share to this assessment. As it seemed to many observers, Clarence Darrow, one of Scopes's defense attorneys, had defeated the most prominent member of the prosecution team, three-time Democratic presidential candidate and former U.S. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan<sup>7</sup>, in something like a legal Gunfight at the O.K. Corral. Under questioning from Darrow, Bryan, a well-known champion of the fundamentalist movement, had appeared to prove his ignorance both of science and the Bible. Darrow had seemingly made Bryan confess that God had not created the world in the course of six days – at least this was the impression of many observers. Fittingly, Bryan, the apparent archetype of fundamentalist narrow-mindedness, died five days after the trial, dramatizing the defeat of fundamentalism before the eyes of the world.

However, it was not Darrow, aging and highly controversial even within the ranks of the country's secular progressives, who set the tone of liberal remembrance of the Scopes Trial, but H. L. Mencken, columnist for the *Baltimore Sun*, spiritual leader of the journalists present at the trial, and doyen of a skeptical-ironic and elitist version of American liberalism<sup>8</sup>. More than anybody else,

of Change: America in the Progressive Era, 1890–1920, (New Brunswick 2000); *Ellis W. Hawley*, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order: A History of the American People and Their Institutions* (New York 1992); *David J. Goldberg*, *Discontented America: The United States in the 1920s* (Baltimore 1999). Social histories of the era include: *Harvey Green*, *The Uncertainty of Everyday Life, 1915–1945* (repr. Fayetteville 2000); *David E. Kyvig*, *Daily Life in the United States, 1920–1940: How Americans Lived through the “Roaring Twenties” and the Great Depression* (repr. Chicago 2004).

<sup>5</sup> *T. J. Jackson Lears*, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (repr. Chicago 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Contemporary observers such as *Walter Lippman*, *American Inquisitors: A Commentary on Dayton and Chicago* (New York 1928), and in a more sweeping way, *H. L. Mencken*, *Treatise on the Gods* (New York 1930), portrayed the issue as a clash between modernity and fundamentalist religiosity. Older histories of the Scopes Trial, such as *Ray Ginger*, *Six Days or Forever?: Tennessee v. John Scopes* (Boston 1958), followed that original framework.

<sup>7</sup> *Michael Kazin*, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York 2006); *Paolo E. Coletta*, *William Jennings Bryan*, vol. 3: *Political Puritan, 1915–1925* (Lincoln 1969); *David D. Anderson*, *William Jennings Bryan* (Boston 1981).

<sup>8</sup> On Mencken's place within post-World War I American thought, *Fred Hobson*, *Mencken: A Life* (Baltimore 1994).

Mencken portrayed the event as a struggle between urban modernity and rural hillbillies, a drama in which religion in general played the role of the villain. Repeatedly in his letters and reports, he mocked the sweating, stinking, uneducated farmers in the overcrowded courtroom. After having attended a service at a black Pentecostal congregation, his colleagues also expressed their dismay over the emotionality of the believers<sup>9</sup>. Mencken remarked to a friend that he had come to Dayton for a laugh but in the end left full of horror<sup>10</sup>. Baptists and Methodists, in his disparaging judgement, were representatives of the country's "vulgar democracy", which was exactly what Bryan defended so fiercely<sup>11</sup>. But not only Mencken adjudged Dayton as backward and its Christian inhabitants as mentally challenged. Even Mary Bryan, wife of the counsel to the prosecution, in her letters describing the trial, did not refrain from expressing numerous complaints about the inhabitants of Dayton, whom she also found backward in many ways<sup>12</sup>.

Initially local businesspeople had believed that this trial – which in reality they had staged as a test case with the help of the American Civil Liberties Union, then a new organization – would support tourism in their town, but they were bitterly disappointed. Dayton became a symbolic place and not a real one, a synonym for the dangers fundamentalism posed for modernity. In the ensuing decades, this view was perpetuated and consolidated in popular culture and scholarship. Mencken's point of view guided the original play and movie versions of *Inherit the Wind*, along with its various revivals and remakes for the rest of the century. Within the so-called consensus history in the 1950s and 1960s, Richard Hofstadter above all took up and further developed Mencken's critical paradigm<sup>13</sup>. And then, the social historians of the following decades, who for a long time turned a blind eye to religion, saw no reason to abandon the long established interpretation of the Scopes Trial as embodying a religiously based conflict between city and country.

Only over the last two decades has the shift away from classic models of secularization and modernity allowed for a re-examination of what might, maliciously reduced to one person, be labeled the "Mencken paradigm". In the following essay, I will first detail a new interpretation of the Scopes Trial and then will situate this view within U.S. historiography since the 1980s. The trial of John Scopes provides insight into the complexity of any question concerning the meaning of the term "modernity". This term needs to be understood through reflective self-examination. It needs as well to be interpreted on two levels simultaneously: at the factual level of history, where it concerns the self-identification of several groups of actors, and at the level of the history of scientific interpretation, of epistemes in

<sup>9</sup> *Conkin*, Gods 86.

<sup>10</sup> *Kazin*, Godly Hero 298.

<sup>11</sup> *Conkin*, Gods 102.

<sup>12</sup> *Kazin*, Godly Hero 291–292.

<sup>13</sup> *Richard Hofstadter*, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York 1963) 116–119. For an earlier, but similar perspective: *Merle Curti*, *The Growth of American Thought* (New York 1943) 704–706.

the sense of Michel Foucault<sup>14</sup>. Metaphorically speaking: in recent decades, an academic and societal frame of reference or the resonant space has opened for a revision of the historical image of religion's place in modernity.

\*\*\*

Notwithstanding the weight of prior historiography, a revised view of the Scopes Trial had become urgent, because much about the event did not really fit within the traditional scheme of interpretation. Dayton was no remote country town. It was a mining town closely connected to New York's industrial and capital interests, although mining in the region was already on the decline. The local audience did not show much inclination toward Bryan nor Darrow. They displayed more interest in the moderate ACLU counsel Dudley Malone, a Catholic whose specialties included divorce law and a Democratic politician who had served as Undersecretary of State under Bryan. The public at the trial responded positively to Malone's impassionate defense of scientific freedom, which he argued had an underlying compatibility with religion rightly understood. Minute-long ovations accompanied Malone's conciliatory plea. Also, those present, even Darrow's colleagues, had certainly not perceived the confrontation of Darrow and Bryan as a victory by Darrow but rather as a miserable draw between two aging stars moving at the scientific level of 1750. Furthermore, Bryan was by no means the dim-witted fool he was said to be. Rather, as asserted by his explicitly empathetic biographer, Michael Kazin, he was a populist Democrat and Christian liberal who struggled continuously for the rights of the common man against commercial and other elitist special interests. Nevertheless, Kazin felt it necessary to remark that it would have been better if after the seventh day of the trial Bryan – just like God after the act of creation – had taken a rest<sup>15</sup>.

Finally, scholarly histories of religion and religious culture have drawn distinctions between evangelicalism, fundamentalism, and the Pentecostal Holiness movement much more precisely than Mencken did. The journalist completely confused these movements with one another, as did Hofstadter in his wake. All of a sudden, historians found that fundamentalism had indeed not been a Southern-rural, but a Northern-urban phenomenon. In Dayton, as Paul Conkin explained, there was not one fundamentalist to be found<sup>16</sup> – and I hope to be able to explain why that was the case. Even state representative John W. Butler, who was responsible for the notorious Butler Act, was in religious terms not so much a fundamentalist or an evangelical as he was a strict, orthodox Calvinist Primitive Baptist. He, along with his sometimes-hesitant colleagues from the Tennessee legislature, showed less interest in theological questions than in preserving traditional Victorian values which they believed to be threatened by Darwinian evolution. In a

<sup>14</sup> See *Achim Landwehr*, *Geschichte des Sagbaren: Einführung in die Historische Diskursanalyse* (Tübingen 2004).

<sup>15</sup> *Kazin*, *Godly Hero* 285–295.

<sup>16</sup> *Conkin*, *Gods* 85.

classical Calvinist way, Butler and his allies mixed ethical and theological lines of argument, however with ethics as their clear priority.

Above all, research has at least qualified the priority of religion in the events at Dayton, for example Conkin, following Larson<sup>17</sup>, highlighted in his interpretation other issues that also mattered at the time: the reflections of American intellectuals on religion and science, the value of intellectuals and experts in a democratic society, and relations between moderns and apparently unmodern “others”<sup>18</sup>. In contrast, Moran, in line with his own research interests, stressed not just the Scopes Trial’s connections to American racism but especially the implicit role of Victorian and modern discourses on gender patterns and sexuality<sup>19</sup>. These approaches presented and contextualized religious debates more clearly than the earlier, one-sided fixation on religion as the primary issue.

In this essay, I will rely on this reinterpretation of the Scopes Trial, which is in some ways partial and in others fundamental, and I will analyze the various groups of actors in terms of the extent to which they can be assigned primarily to the urban or rural segments of society and in terms of their relation to contemporary ideas of modernization. The empirical basis for answering this second question hinges on the respective attitudes of these actors toward mass democratic participation, toward the idea of market capitalism in its consumerist form, toward progress-oriented optimism, toward science, in particular Darwin’s theory of evolution together with the eugenic implications of social Darwinism, toward the historical-critical interpretation of the Scriptures, and toward sacred ritual as well as internalized, subjective-personal forms of faith.

In the background, the theories of the British social anthropologist Mary Douglas have influenced my approach. According to Douglas, socio-cultural systems create their appropriate variants of religiosity, which do not follow a linear-evolutionary development from a primitive, outside-directed ritualism to a personal, inside-directed, ritual-critical religiosity; one needs to keep in mind religiosity’s fluidity in relation to the coherence of a social system or social-moral milieu<sup>20</sup>. In this way, the inflexible dichotomies between city and country and modernity and anti-modernity will be qualified, at least with regard to the religious development of the United States in the 1920s, without the need to completely abandon these analytical categories. At the same time, it will become obvious that at no time did American society approach an apocalyptic final battle between the forces of modernity and those of anti-modernity. Instead, society experienced a struggle for discursive sovereignty over the definition of modernity between competing concepts, each outspoken and selective. The groups under analysis as relevant to the Scopes Trial include, roughly, evangelicals, fundamentalists, Pentecostals, and liberal Protestants (here somewhat anachronistically labeled cultural

<sup>17</sup> *Larson*, *Summer for the Gods* 265.

<sup>18</sup> *Conkin*, *Gods* 111–176.

<sup>19</sup> *Moran*, *Scopes Trial* 66–73. *Jeffrey P. Moran*, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge 2000).

<sup>20</sup> *Mary Douglas*, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York 1973).

Protestants or modernists, to distinguish them clearly from secular liberals), as well as secular liberals. Catholics, almost non-existent in the South, played only a very marginal role. My argument requires crossing back-and-forth among groups, as often the collective identity of the various groups was defined against the others and developed only in the course of struggle with one another.

Nonetheless, we will start with the fundamentalists. Long before the events of September 11, 2001, “fundamentalism” had become a programmatic keyword which, like the concept of totalitarianism in the 1950s, is used less as a scholarly term with a definite meaning and more as a term that stops argument. Fundamentalism becomes a counter-concept to an emphatic concept of Enlightenment. That is to say, a fundamentalist is a fanatical religious opponent of Enlightenment and modernity, the latter understood in no less of a normative way. However, this way of applying the concept is not useful for the United States in the early twentieth century. In that period, comparably well-defined groups of people existed who developed the concept of fundamentalism and who used it, starting about 1920, as a name for themselves<sup>21</sup>. This movement had emerged after the late 1870s amid theological opposition to liberal Protestantism, which had come from Germany via the Ritschl school and which starting in the 1890s was supported by the majority of the Chicago school of theology. Liberal Protestantism derived from the Enlightenment, historicism, and the nineteenth-century, bourgeois-liberal, anthropological-optimistic belief in progress. The liberals attempted to adjust Christian faith to the intellectual demands of the modern age, particularly through historical-critical interpretation of the Bible, which in their view should no longer be read as the Holy Book of revelation but mainly as an historical and philological relic of antiquity or as an ethical manifesto. This also meant that all miracle stories were either interpreted away or reinterpreted in a rationalistic way. No longer did God intervene with events in the world, a mindset that created space for inner-directed, openly anti-ritualist and anti-sacramental, ethically individualistic and autonomous processes of modernity. In the United States, this modernist Protestant culture was often connected to the social reform movement known as the Social Gospel, advocates of which sought fundamental reform of the American economy, workers’ rights, and the improvement of the social situation of the working class<sup>22</sup>.

For the fundamentalists, both modernist theology and the Social Gospel were unacceptable. According to their Calvinist tradition of exegesis – which in

<sup>21</sup> *Michael Hochgeschwender*, *Amerikanische Religion: Evangelikalismus, Pfingstlertum und Fundamentalismus* (Frankfurt a.M. 2007) 117–165; on the situation in the U.S. South: *New Encyclopaedia of Southern Culture*, vol. I: Religion (2006); also *Allan J. Lichtman*, *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement* (New York 2008).

<sup>22</sup> On the Social Gospel: *Chambers*, *Tyranny of Change* 105–110; *Ronald C. White, C. Howard Hopkins*, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia 1976); *Ronald C. White Jr.*, *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel, 1877–1925* (Louisville 1990); *Robert H. Craig*, *Religion and Radical Politics: An Alternative Christian Tradition in the United States* (Philadelphia 1992).

contrast to German Lutheranism did not acknowledge any adequate criteria for the internal qualification and hierarchical ranking of the Scripture (such as the *sola gratia* principle) – the historical-critical method looked meaningless. From a theological perspective, it seemed a trivialization of orthodox faith. In the view of these critics of modernist theology, Jesus of Nazareth was no ethicist, a position supported by present-day insights based upon the critical method. He was God's own son and the Savior of Mankind. God Himself remained an active god, immediately in touch with man's fate. But most of all God remained the Creator of the world and thus the guarantor of its order. For this, the fundamentalists reached back less to a purely word-by-word exegesis of the Book of Genesis, although they liked to claim this. Rather, they used physico-theological arguments which were standard among theologians from the Early Modern era through the Enlightenment and into the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Briton William Paley counted as an important physico-theologist throughout the Anglo-Saxon world. With his theory, Darwin had especially sought to delegitimize Paley<sup>23</sup>.

Initially, therefore, the conflict was not at all about a literal interpretation of the Bible. For the early fundamentalists – as for Bryan during the Scopes Trial – the question of how many days it had taken God to create the world was mostly irrelevant. Like their liberal, modernist opponents, the early fundamentalists were educated theologians from the great East Coast universities that competed with the University of Chicago; both sides came from a similar, urban elite background. Only a few southerners, such as J. Frank Norris and Amzi C. Dixon<sup>24</sup>, aligned with the early fundamentalists. From a theological perspective, they were systematics in a struggle for academic hegemony against the adherents of biblical exegesis. Early fundamentalism included such major intellectuals as J. Gresham Machen<sup>25</sup>. From a political perspective, they were conservatives with a pronounced skepticism concerning human nature. They thus opposed both the secular and religious claims of the liberals. In a sense, the high-minded theologians recalled and indeed sought to revive the Whig consensus of the pre-Civil War era, they sought an American society that was democratic and yet deliberative and circumspect, founded on Victorian values and gender codes<sup>26</sup>.

These fundamentalist intellectuals greatly lamented the break-up of the liberal-evangelical reform coalition of the 1820s–1870s. The issue of creation or evolution occupied a symbolic place in this split; it stood in the foreground of the era's con-

<sup>23</sup> On such debates in the United States, *Louis Menand*, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas* (New York 2001) 364–365. Also “Physikotheologie”, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (1989); *Alister McGrath*, *Naturwissenschaft und Religion: Eine Einführung* (Freiburg i. Br. 2001) 120–172.

<sup>24</sup> Fundamentalism, in: *New Encyclopaedia of Southern Culture*, vol. I: Religion (2006).

<sup>25</sup> *Conkin*, *Gods* 112–119.

<sup>26</sup> On the Whig political mindset, *Daniel Walker Howe*, *What Hath God Wrought? The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York 2007) 436–448; *Sean Wilentz*, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York 2005) 482–490. Also *Alan Hunt*, *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation* (Cambridge 1999).

licts over the interpretation of religion<sup>27</sup>. At the same time, it was precisely their skepticism over human nature which caused them to take an ambivalent or even hostile attitude toward liberals and toward progressive programs of social reform<sup>28</sup>. They were not convinced by the liberal, progressive argument that social conditions could be identified, analyzed, and ameliorated. The funding that the fundamentalists received from segments of high finance and the oil industry for their public relations activities may have contributed to or intensified their reservations. The progressive theologian Walter Rauschenbusch, himself a former evangelical, was certainly right when he accused the fundamentalists and evangelicals of lacking the spirit of prophetic social criticism<sup>29</sup>.

In contrast to numerous progressives and later liberals, the fundamentalists expressed an unreserved belief in the market, consumerism, and capitalism<sup>30</sup>. In that respect, as well as with regard to their understanding of democracy, they undoubtedly exhibited characteristics of modernity in that period. Moreover, many of them rejected any kind of intervention in politics, such as laws against the theory of evolution in some southern states, as contrary to the separation of state and church. Thus it was no coincidence that none of the leading fundamentalists showed up in Dayton. During World War I, the fundamentalists' anti-German and nationalist sentiments became almost as important as their theological and political stances. They arrayed themselves on the side of the 100-percent Americanists, thereby contributing their share to the Americanization of the country's discourse over national identity<sup>31</sup>. This, too, gave evidence of their modernity.

Only during the 1910s and 1920s, in the course of the era's struggle for socio-cultural and discursive dominance, did fundamentalism develop into a broader movement. In this period, fundamentalism stuck to its market-oriented conservatism and Victorian ideals, but it also allied with the consumerist, evangelical revivalism that had taken shape around Dwight L. Moody in the big cities of the North. From this environment came the ideas that gradually spread in the South and also marked Bryan's religious mindset, so to speak a popularized variant of academic fundamentalism. It was this popularized fundamentalism upon which Bryan drew when attacking the biology textbook at the center of the Scopes controversy. Bryan focused his criticism on those parts of George William Hunter's *Civic Biology* (1914), an official textbook of the state of Tennessee, which re-

<sup>27</sup> This alliance broke up not only over Darwinism but over Prohibition and other issues. *Thomas Welskopp*, *Amerikas große Ernüchterung: Eine Kulturgeschichte der Prohibition* (Paderborn 2010) 11–50; *James A. Morone*, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven 2003) 123–349.

<sup>28</sup> *Maureen A. Flanagan*, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms, 1890s–1920s* (New York 2007); *Michael McGerr*, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America* (New York 2003).

<sup>29</sup> *White, Hopkins*, *The Social Gospel* xvii, 249–252.

<sup>30</sup> *William Leach*, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York 1994) 154–224.

<sup>31</sup> *Noah Pickus*, *True Faith and Allegiance: Immigration and American Civic Nationalism* (Princeton 2005).



counted Darwin's theory of evolution. Bryan overlooked those passages that discussed social Darwinism and its eugenic and race-hygiene consequences, even though the book went so far as to suggest that euthanasia might be appropriate to prevent from having children those families that did not meet standards of eugenic optimization. On such matters, the fundamentalists as well as their popular spokesmen could be as racist and social-Darwinist as many of their liberal opponents<sup>32</sup>. It is nevertheless important that Bryan turned the fundamentalist argument into an entirely unconventional direction. Whether from political instinct or intent, he grasped onto an essential shortcoming of his liberal opponents: their sometimes ambivalent attitude toward popular sovereignty and democracy. For Mencken's sort of urbane modernists and in a different way for those progressives with an inclination toward social engineering, the state could seem to be a kind of enlightened-constitutional despot in the service of education and modernization, with academic experts and elites showing the way to the future. Bryan, on the other hand, openly declared that any reform not starting out from the people was necessarily doomed to failure. But that meant taking the interests and the faith of the common people seriously as their rights. In terms of the theory of democracy, this raised important questions concerning the value of experts and elites in a fundamentally democratic society.

And that was exactly the starting point for the reception of fundamentalist principles among southern evangelicals and Pentecostals. In Mary Douglas's sense, southern fundamentalism developed into an open, fluid social formation which had created – now in Weber's sense – a conglomerate of beliefs that was highly modern, inner-directed, anti-ritualist, individualistic, and subjective in ways that fit the social needs of its adherents (Here Douglas, however, would point to the parallel “modernity” of the anti-ritualist religious system of the Mbuti Pygmies, thereby calling into question Weber's linear-evolutionist understanding of modernization)<sup>33</sup>. Southern-style fundamentalism became deeply democratic (though deeply racist, apart from a few Pentecostal congregations) and gave a clear priority to the individual. The tendency proved compatible with the free market. The movement was definitely not hostile to capitalism; rather it exhibited a friendly or curious disinterest toward business. It was very emotional and independent-minded.

In this way, the southern mode of evangelical-Pentecostal piety provided a flexible frame of possibilities which, building on strong traditions, allowed for the

<sup>32</sup> *Christine Rosen*, *Preaching Eugenics: Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement* (New York 2004) 66–69, 124, points, however, to shared reservations among conservative Protestants and Catholics, for example in Louisiana, who resisted proposals for eugenic marriage legislation propagated by American race hygienists around 1910. Also, *Edwin Black*, *War against the Weak: Eugenics and America's Campaign to Create a Master Race* (New York 2003); *Gregory Michael Dorr*, *Segregation's Science: Eugenics and Society in Virginia* (Charlottesville 2008); *Mark A. Largent*, *Breeding Contempt: The History of Coerced Sterilization in the United States* (New Brunswick 2008).

<sup>33</sup> *Douglas*, *Natural Symbols* ch. 1–4.

stable integration of the “modern” ways of thinking about autonomy and subjectivity (though within the framework of theonomy), individualism, participatory mass democracy, capitalism, and consumerism. The fusion of fundamentalism and southern popular religion proved the starting point of a specific *agency*. However, on account of their more traditional way of life, southern evangelicals and Pentecostals took little interest in the theological quarrels of northerners. The social reform agenda of Protestant modernists simply did not meet the social realities of their everyday situation. These patterns reflected the loose institutional structure of their religions. The religious world of the South was also more homogenous than the pluralist environments of northern cities. Episcopalians were considered an upper-middle-class church; Catholics were hardly found; and Lutherans were identified with particular ethnic groups. Among southern Baptists, the largest denomination, the retention rate was much higher than among the liberal denominations in the North. Even so, detailed analyses of religious organization in the South have revealed that about 90 percent of evangelical parishes held services once a month at the most, while 80 percent did not have their own reverend<sup>34</sup>. This meant that well into the twentieth century, the “camp meeting”, an irregularly occurring event characterized by the emotional and theatrically staged conversion of the believers, was the most important cornerstone of faith<sup>35</sup>.

In much of the South, there was no structural basis for supra-individual dogmas, questions of orthodoxy, rituals, etc. The circumstances of the region gave priority to individual freedom, which was emphasized even more by the Pentecostals than by the evangelicals, with their older tradition of awakening. Starting in the 1940s, the organizational conditions of southern Christianity changed in ways that allowed for the establishment of more consolidated structures. Only then did southern Protestantism grow more dogmatic and orthodox in outlook – and then almost automatically more political. Southern Christianity was not primarily rural, though its town manifestations built upon its rural foundation. Overall, it shared the selective modernity of every grouping involved in the social conflicts of the 1920s, including the secular liberals and the liberal Protestants.

The social and cultural fronts in the conflict over modernization and social transformation in the 1920s, therefore, were much more varied and fragmented than suggested by the Mencken paradigm. The sides did not simply break down as pre-modern, irrationally pious country people confronting enlightened, cosmopolitan, secular urban people. Often the lines cut across these groups, which Mencken and others of his mind (as well as some opponents) postulated a priori. Each group struggled for its own understanding of market capitalism, modern technology, the growing plurality of life, democracy, Darwin’s doctrine of evolution, and in many cases eugenics and racism. Often, modern, enlightened de-

<sup>34</sup> Churches, Country, in: *New Encyclopaedia of Southern Culture*, vol. I: Religion (2006).

<sup>35</sup> *Edward L. Ayers*, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York 1992) 399–408, *Randall J. Stephens*, *Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge 2008). On urban manifestations of these trends, *Matthew Avery Sutton*, *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge 2007).

fenders of Darwin supported an aggressive, racist version of eugenics, an attitude they shared with some conservative, fundamentalist Protestants. The situation became even more paradoxical if one takes into account American Catholics, the majority of whom lived in cities in the country's industrial regions<sup>36</sup>. Like the fundamentalists, Catholics found it difficult to accept Darwin's theory of evolution, if for reasons less rooted directly in the Bible. Catholics shared the racism of their environment, although they tended to reject eugenics either explicitly or implicitly<sup>37</sup>. Catholic ethnic groups were skeptical concerning market capitalism, although they adjusted to it, and they gradually accepted a pluralist democracy, albeit with no intention of letting this pluralism compromise their own cultures and community structures. As was the case with evangelicals, Pentecostals, fundamentalists, and liberal Protestants, both liberal and ultramontane-conservative Catholics took a variety of stances toward various aspects of modernization, ranging from hostile and defensive to accepting and even triumphalist. Overall, urban Catholics appeared less modern than urban fundamentalists or rural evangelicals and Pentecostals, at least according to the standards of the age.

Yet even unconstrained supporters of anything new, of modernity in the strict and singular sense, were not free of fears, often unacknowledged. In the foreground stood issues of class, which furthermore were charged with dimensions of race and gender. After the dissolution of the nineteenth-century, liberal-evangelical reform coalition – a division symbolized and fueled by such issues as Darwinism and Prohibition – elements of the secular, liberal bourgeoisie at times expressed a fairly traditional ideology of elite rule. In my opinion, Mencken's sometimes sneering tirades, which exhibited many topoi of intellectual superiority, show deeply rooted insecurity, indeed an elitist fear of the obscurantism and indolence of the masses. Mencken's is a rhetoric of obsessive social discipline, ironic, expressed in brilliant compound sentences, and quite in accordance with the tradition of Enlightenment. Mencken's fear of fundamentalists was related to his fear of the troublesome working class, of Catholics and, often enough, of Jews. He reflected an insecurity among some secular modernists and liberals that was enhanced by their knowledge of what the unprecedented catastrophe World War I had meant for civilization. The fight over Prohibition intensified the fight against the fundamentalists, who were denounced as anti-modern at a time when modernity became part of the self-identity of liberalism as well as part of its claim to cultural hegemony. Acceptance of Darwinism became a token of modernity at a time when the Darwinian version of evolution was still, in reality, not unequivocally accepted by scientists.

Nevertheless, Mencken hardly counts as an archetypal representative of the progressive and optimistic liberal tradition of the nineteenth century, a tradition

<sup>36</sup> On American Catholic attitudes toward American society, culture, and politics, *John T. McGreevy*, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York 2003) 91–165; on social Catholicism, *Dorothy M. Brown*, *Elisabeth McKeown*, *The Poor Belong to Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare* (Cambridge 1997).

<sup>37</sup> *Rosen*, *Preaching Eugenics* 139–164, explains Catholic ambivalence concerning eugenics.

which went into eclipse for several decades. Rather, Mencken represented a nearly aristocratic variant of Nietzschean skepticism concerning the desires of ordinary people, the masses driven by instincts and full of resentment, who seemed to him simply to go with the current<sup>38</sup>. Mencken thus symbolized the contradictions of the bourgeoisie in the period after *fin de siècle* and World War I. Later generations of historians, stamped by modernization and secularization theories, did not appreciate the subtle refinement of his relativism and perspectivism. As with Nietzsche, Mencken knew very well where the respective enemy was and had no use for any kind of contextualization.

\*\*\*

The public image of the Scopes Trial that for decades had been communicated in the media, popular culture, and historical writing underwent a radical change in the two decades after 1990. This revisionist understanding did not result from new sources or previously unknown facts; neither of these could be expected. Rather, it was an expression of a new way of understanding the available material, the result of a slow and gradual paradigm shift – in the sociology of knowledge sense – rather than a revolution of thought. So far, it is not possible to describe this process in detail, since no account yet exists for the years since 1990 similar to Peter Novick's pioneering history of American historiography in the twentieth century to the 1980s<sup>39</sup>. That is why the following discussion can only be cursory and speculative. I will proceed in two stages, first by asking about the new value of religious history in the wider context of American history, and then by discussing the broader outlook and ideals on which the suggested paradigm shift was founded. The starting point of my discussion is the thesis that religion was neglected by the New Social History of the 1960s and 1970s<sup>40</sup>, which in this respect had taken up the inheritance of the liberal consensus history of the 1950s.

In a noteworthy essay on the situation of religious history within American historiography, Jon Butler in 2004 diagnosed a strange imbalance<sup>41</sup>. Whereas for the period before 1870 religion has remained an integral, indispensable part of historic accounts of the United States, religion did not play a large role in historical writing for periods after the Civil War and particularly for the twentieth century. This has

<sup>38</sup> *Terry Teachout*, *The Skeptic: A Life of H. L. Mencken* (New York 2002), and esp. *William H. A. Williams*, *H. L. Mencken Revisited* (New York 1998) 12–17.

<sup>39</sup> *Peter Novick*, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York 1991) esp. 415–629; Also *David Harlan*, *The Degradation of American History* (Chicago 1997).

<sup>40</sup> For example, *Eric Foner* (ed.), *The New American History* (Philadelphia 1990), completely ignores religion as a distinct subject matter.

<sup>41</sup> *Jon Butler*, "Jack-in-the-Box Faith: The Religion Problem in Modern American History", in: *Journal of American History* 90/4 (2004) 1357–1378; also *Harry S. Stout*, *Darryl G. Hart* (eds.), *New Directions in American Religious History* (New York 1997). For a more optimistic account, *Michael Hochgeschwender*, *Religion, nationale Mythologie und nationale Identität: Zu den methodischen und inhaltlichen Debatten in der amerikanischen New Religious History*, in: *Historisches Jahrbuch* 124 (2004) 435–520.

been especially true in histories published since the 1940s. For the period after 1870, the overwhelming majority of American textbooks did not present religion as an integral part of American history. It appeared as a kind of *deus ex machina* which occasionally appears and then disappears again. Examples include standard treatment of the Scopes Trial and the religious right movement in the 1980s. In contrast to conservative authors, Butler saw this trend toward overlooking religion, to which there were important exceptions<sup>42</sup>, not predominantly as an effect of secular-humanist, anti-religious sympathies of liberal and radical historians. Rather, it was a result of culturally and socially influenced patterns of perception that were themselves molded by the expectations of modernization theory and its secularization hypothesis<sup>43</sup>. In all genres of history, from conventional narratives of politics to the history of ideas to analyses of social structure, authors had almost always treated religion as simply irrelevant. Drawing upon William Sewell, we might add that the abstract level at which such theoretical approaches operated led scholars to overlook the personal level and people's own perceptions and interpretations<sup>44</sup>. If modernity was accompanied by secularization, and if abstract structures, models, and class analyses were more important than the ways that personal actors shaped their respective socio-cultural realities, the conclusion was inevitable that religion as such did not offer an adequate subject area for modern historiography.

However, by the 1980s, this point of view became obsolete. Developments on several levels in American politics, society, and culture made reconsideration of the secularization paradigm essential. In contrast to predictions, religious phenomena did not leave the stage. Decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court interpreted as anti-religious prompted the ongoing evangelical revival movement, whose origins in the early Cold War years had been overlooked even by experts, to move away from the political and social mainstream and grow more and more radical<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> Throughout the period for which Butler perceived neglect, excellent histories of American religion continued to appear. For overviews, *Sidney E. Ahlstrom*, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven 1972); *Jon Butler*, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge 1990); *Mark A. Noll*, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids 1992); *Peter W. Williams*, *America's Religions: From Their Origins to the Twenty-First Century* (Urbana 2002), and especially *Martin E. Marty*, *Modern American Religion*, 3 vols. (Chicago 1986–1996).

<sup>43</sup> In Europe, the secularization paradigm developed more clearly from anti-clerical and especially anti-Catholic sentiments within the nineteenth-century, bourgeois-liberal milieu, with its notions of enlightenment and progress. *Manuel Borutta*, *Genealogie der Säkularisierungstheorie: Zur Historisierung einer großen Erzählung der Moderne*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 36 (2010) 347–376. On the American manifestation of these ideas, *Christian Smith* (ed.), *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life* (Berkeley 2003).

<sup>44</sup> *William H. Sewell Jr.*, *The Logic of History* (Chicago 2005).

<sup>45</sup> *Rainer Prätorius*, *In God We Trust: Religion und Politik in den USA* (München 2003); on the political consequences of Supreme Court rulings such as *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) or *Roe v. Wade* (1973): *Manfred Broker*, *Protest – Anpassung – Etablierung: Die Christliche Rechte im politischen System der USA* (Frankfurt a. M. 2004) 325–344.

Meanwhile, the counterculture of the 1960s sparked a massive reaction among social, cultural, and religious conservatives. These various trends culminated in the New Religious Right<sup>46</sup>. Especially in the 1970s, the Democratic Party moved clearly to the left, with its liberal wing an open advocate of new cultural movements. Thus the Democrats no longer offered an alternative to the Republicans for religious conservative constituencies, whose social ideas seemed oriented toward the nineteenth century or the 1950s. Ronald Reagan and then George W. Bush succeeded in establishing close ties to evangelicals from the white middle class, who for a long time had been wavering between the Democrats and Republicans, who also appealed to a segment of conservative Catholics and even orthodox Jews. In this way, religious groups exerted increasing influence within Republican politics<sup>47</sup>.

Since some of the quarrels of the late twentieth century arose over the same issues as during the 1920s, above all Darwin's theory of evolution, comparable interpretative reflexes appeared<sup>48</sup>. Widespread talk of "culture wars" by itself signaled how seriously this struggle for cultural hegemony was taken by all participants, not only among academics. Both sides, liberals and conservatives, saw themselves as on the defensive in the media and in institutions such as universities. At times, they even believed themselves to be surrounded by conspiracies from the other side. Nevertheless, there were efforts at detailed and unsentimental social-science analyses<sup>49</sup>. The concentration on the political dimensions of these contemporary religious revivals reveals one problem that American historians had in understanding this unexpected revival of religion. Differentiations and rivalries within religion, for example the politics of the African American churches or left-wing evangelicalism, were obscured by the focus on the social and cultural world of right-wing evangelicals, Pentecostals, and fundamentalists. Moreover, with a few exceptions, there was little attempt to connect these post-Baby Boom revivals with earlier waves of revivalism and to examine the structural and functional

<sup>46</sup> On the emergence of the religious conservative movement, *William C. Berman*, *America's Right Turn: From Nixon to Clinton* (Baltimore 1998); *Bruce J. Schulman*, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (repr. New York 2002); *Philip Jenkins*, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York 2006); *Daniel T. Rogers*, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge 2011).

<sup>47</sup> *Randall Balmer*, *God in the White House: How Faith Shaped the Presidency from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush* (New York 2008); *D. Michael Lindsay*, *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite* (New York 2007).

<sup>48</sup> *Jonathan Zimmermann*, *Whose America? Culture Wars in Public Schools* (Cambridge 2002) 1–8; *Michael Ruse*, *The Evolution-Creation Struggle* (Cambridge 2005).

<sup>49</sup> *John R. Pottenger*, *Reaping the Whirlwind: Liberal Democracy and the Religious Axis* (Washington 2007); *Damon Linker*, *The Theocons: Secular America under Siege* (New York 2007); *Paul Boyer*, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge 1992); *Lisa McGirr*, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton 2001); *Sara Diamond*, *Not by Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right* (New York 1998); *idem*, *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* (Boston 1989); *idem*, *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (New York 1995).

causes for the undeniable continuity of apocalyptic, revivalist Christianity in the United States<sup>50</sup>. Anyway, the obvious rebirth of religion in American public life forced historians to examine modernization theory and the secularization paradigm more critically than before. It was all too obvious that both the predictive and prescriptive value of this theory had not survived its encounter with empiricism. It became necessary again to include religious history in the overall discourse of history.

Such critical reassessment of the secularization thesis in the United States was a sufficient, but not a necessary precondition for a revised interpretation of events surrounding the Scopes Trial. On the contrary, the opposite might have been expected, given right-wing evangelical fundamentalism's vehement anti-intellectual criticism of the sciences in the context of the debate on creationism, "intelligent design", and Darwinism. This would seem to invite a move away from the predictive implications of the secularization thesis, but also intense criticism of the counter-Enlightenment and the seemingly anti-modern stance of the fundamentalists. But only natural scientists, the British writer Richard Dawkins prominent among them, adopted such a perspective. By contrast, historians turned more intensively to religious history and to cultural theories of science, rather than toward Dawkins's form of revisionism, an historiographic pattern that requires explanation<sup>51</sup>. Paradoxically, it was not historians suspected of being close to fundamentalism who now took a relativistic, science-critical and perspectivist position, but historians who moved within recent discourses on modernity. Fundamentalists tended instead toward universal claims of truth, of the sort typical of the Early Modern age and Enlightenment and that were compatible with pre-modern forms of cognition. Obviously, the wheel of Enlightenment, understood as permanent criticism and self-criticism, had made yet another turn.

This was by no means a new development. Since the nineteenth century, the original aims of the Enlightenment, including the modern, universalist ideologies that derived from the Enlightenment, especially bourgeois liberalism, had been in a double crisis. On the one hand, the class basis of this specific variant of modernity became shaky. From the beginning, diverse versions of Enlightenment, including its notions of modernity, had legitimized the claims to participation and then the rule of liberal middle classes. At the same time, Enlightenment liberalism

<sup>50</sup> For the post-Baby-Boom context of recent revivalism: *Preston Shires*, *Hippies of the Religious Right* (Waco 2007); *Patrick Allitt*, *Religion in America since 1945: A History* (New York 2003); *Robert Wuthnow*, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since 1945* (Princeton 1988). For efforts to connect this to the American revivalist tradition overall: *Robert Jewett*, *Ole Wangerin*, *Mission und Verführung: Amerikas religiöser Weg in vier Jahrhunderten* (Göttingen 2008); *Morone*, *Hellfire Nation*, overemphasizes the significance of Puritan traditions and thus misunderstands the genuinely modern nature of American revivalist religiosity; see *Hochgeschwender*, *Amerikanische Religion*.

<sup>51</sup> *Doris Bachmann-Medick*, *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Reinbek bei Hamburg 2006); *Ute Daniel*, *Kompendium Kulturgeschichte* (Frankfurt a. M. 2001). For a balanced account of these historiographic debates: *Chris Lorenz*, *Konstruktion der Vergangenheit: Eine Einführung in die Geschichtstheorie* (Köln 1997).

opened the way to a far-reaching participation dynamic. In the nineteenth century, this started with the turn towards mass democracy in the United States above all, a trend that by the twentieth century had gathered new momentum among the societies of the North Atlantic<sup>52</sup>. Primarily during the period between 1947 and 1975 that Eric Hobsbawm called the “golden age of capitalism” and Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Lutz Raphael called the “boom period”<sup>53</sup>, this mass participation dynamic was fully unleashed, though it changed character from political-social participation to market conformity. As a result of the social mobility among certain non-bourgeois segments of society, the comparably high degree of socio-economic homogeneity of the social levels identified with the enlightened-liberal modernity paradigm was lost. This group had previously been able to maintain its linear, progress-oriented, evolution-compatible cultural hegemony far into socialist circles<sup>54</sup>.

Even before the collapse of liberalism’s social basis, as a result of both internal and external criticism, the theoretical claims of a universal appeal to reason had gradually been declining for quite some time, though for a long period this had only marginal effects on claims to validity that depended upon the appeal to reason. The basic philosophical challenge of Enlightenment thought could not be maintained in the long run: between empiricist-nominalistic epistemology on one side and the interplay between a universally structured but autonomous subject and universal reason as the essential epistemological tool on the other side<sup>55</sup>. Already during the nineteenth century, philosophers such as Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche undermined the claim to universalism of liberal-bourgeois enlightened modernity with their turn to the priority of bodily existence, possibility, and voluntarism. At the start of the twentieth century, anti-evolutionist, historicist cultural anthropology picked up this criticism<sup>56</sup>. Then, in reaction to the structuralist and functionalist universalisms of the 1950s and 1960s, post-structuralist, post-modern, and post-colonial thinkers offered even more radical versions of such criticisms<sup>57</sup>. Not coincidentally, such attacks accompanied the final end of the predominance of liberal middle classes over society and knowledge.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Hochgeschwender, Was ist der Westen? Zur Ideengeschichte eines politischen Konstrukts, in: Historisch-Politische Mitteilungen 11 (2004) 1–30.

<sup>53</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991 (New York 1996) 225–402. Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, Lutz Raphael, Nach dem Boom: Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte (Göttingen 2010).

<sup>54</sup> Not without reason, Karl Marx, in a letter to Ferdinand Lasalle, pointed to the narrative connection between Darwinist evolutionism and British capitalist, class society, expressing both respect and criticism: Karl Marx to Ferdinand Lasalle, 16 Jan. 1861, in: Marx Engels Werke 30 (Ostberlin 1974) 537.

<sup>55</sup> Gerhard Gamm, Philosophie im Zeitalter der Extreme: Eine Geschichte philosophischen Denkens im 20. Jahrhundert (Darmstadt 2009).

<sup>56</sup> Roland Girtler, Kulturanthropologie: Eine Einführung (Münster 2006); Fredrick Barth et al. (eds.), One Discipline, Four Ways: British, German, French, and American Anthropology (Chicago 2005).

<sup>57</sup> Lutz Raphael, Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeitalter der Extreme: Theorien, Methoden, Tendenzen von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart (München 2003) 215–246.



The turn of these various new streams of thought to the “marginalized”, the “others”, and the “foreign”<sup>58</sup> as well as to their identity politics<sup>59</sup> was connected to social change at the national and global levels. This was even though the most radical supporters of the turn to the marginalized were often firmly rooted in middle-class educational institutions<sup>60</sup>.

In this context, the post-structuralist turn<sup>61</sup> affected both the intellectual foundations of Enlightenment modernity and the epistemological foundations of the natural sciences and thus evolutionary theory. Due to the dissolution of universal logos as well as the subject, which had been instrumentally connected to this logos by reason, there appeared the decentralized quartet of culturality, historicity, virtual mediality, and reflection on the linguistic constitution of the human perception of the world. The turn to the essential historicity of human existence forced a critical analysis of the intellectual foundations of the Enlightenment progress and the modernity paradigm, which entailed a new analysis of the notion of secularization implied by these concepts. For example, it became possible to shed light on the power interests of Enlightenment, on its mythopoetic efforts at denunciation, scandalization, and criminalization of the “foreign other”, especially with regard to one’s own, premodern, European past<sup>62</sup>. This in turn invited critical examination of how such processes shaped traditional ways of understanding modernity<sup>63</sup>.

In the absence of universal reason, absolute claims to validity became just one tradition among many<sup>64</sup>. Now the “other” or “foreign” was no longer considered good if, because, and in so far as it was reasonable, as it had been the case for the

<sup>58</sup> *Sewell*, *Logics of History*; *Oliver Marchart*, *Cultural Studies* (Konstanz 2008). For an overview, *Bernd Jürgen Warnecken*, *Die Ethnographie populärer Kulturen: Eine Einführung* (Wien 2006).

<sup>59</sup> *Homi Bhabha*, *The Location of Culture* (London 2009). For criticisms, *Thomas Meyer*, *Identitätspolitik: Vom Missbrauch kultureller Unterschiede* (Frankfurt a.M. 2002).

<sup>60</sup> *C. Richard King*, Introduction: Dislocating Postcoloniality, Relocating American Empire, in: *C. Richard King* (ed.), *Postcolonial America* (Urbana 2000) 1–20.

<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless one also recognizes that this “turn” cannot be imagined singularly, clearly and coherently. The concentration of historical studies of culture, informed by cultural anthropology, on actors alone cannot be harmonized with the text fixation of post-structuralist literary scholars or with ways that post-colonial thinkers rely on esoteric authorities. All of these approaches share in the criticism of certain postulates of classical Enlightenment modernity in its manifold, often neglected dimensions, but that is all. See my article, *Michael Hochgeschwender*, *Kulturanthropologie und Zeitgeschichte in den USA und Deutschland*, in: *Oliver Scheiding* et al. (eds.), *Kulturtheorie im Dialog: Neuorientierung in der kulturwissenschaftlichen Text-Kontext-Debatte* (Berlin 2011) 225–256.

<sup>62</sup> Consider, for instance, the way in which Enlightenment historiography dealt with the southern European Inquisition or with witch persecutions, which were connected to Enlightenment denunciations of the Middle Ages or to notions in religious scholarship of priestly deception.

<sup>63</sup> *Manuel Borutta*, *Antikatholizismus: Deutschland und Italien im Zeitalter der europäischen Kulturkämpfe* (Göttingen 2010); also *Manuel Borutta*, *Genealogie der Säkularisierungstheorie*.

<sup>64</sup> *Alasdair MacIntyre*, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry* (Notre Dame 1990).

thinkers of the eighteenth century. Rather, the foreign was considered good because it was foreign<sup>65</sup>. From such criticisms arose the necessity of further differentiation of the concepts of Enlightenment, modernity, progress, and secularization. This in turn led to talk of the contingency of modernity<sup>66</sup> or even of multiple modernities<sup>67</sup>. It nevertheless remained unclear what possible counter-concepts or falsification opportunities might look like, if the concept of modernity was extended to such a degree of multi-perspectivity. Or, to put the matter more precisely: Under conditions of “multiple modernities”, what would in theory count as anti-modern or counter-modern? Certainly not religious fundamentalism, for this was predominantly a modern phenomenon, not least due to its high degree of individualism and its criticism of traditional, institutional authorities, typical of such religious movements around the world<sup>68</sup>. In H. L. Mencken’s reception of Nietzsche, indeed in Nietzsche himself, one may find this indirect rehabilitation of religion in general<sup>69</sup> and fundamentalism in particular, an unintended, but logical result of perspectivism.

But critics of Enlightenment and modernity at the end of the twentieth century were not satisfied with this. Right from the beginning, one of the main pillars of enlightened thought about the modern age had been natural-scientific scientism<sup>70</sup>. At least since Dilthey, the distinction between natural science and the humanities had been one of the essential features of the modern philosophy of science. Given the epistemological crisis of the humanities, on which this basic distinction was grounded, natural sciences appeared as role models, since they represented forms of knowledge which seemed capable of and entitled to give an objective description of reality. Since the 1930s, however, this precise claim was undermined in the course of countless scientific debates. Philosophers from completely different perspectives, such as Ludwik Fleck, Karl Popper, Paul Feyerabend, or Dominick LaCapra, as well as leading feminist scholars of gender such as Judith Butler pointed to the connection between social and academic power structures and natural scientific insight or scientific narratives<sup>71</sup>. As Karl Marx had already recognized, this also applied to the formulation of evolution theory, which indeed did not reflect natural reality in an objective way, but was a socio-cultural construct.

Many historians neither could nor would avoid these conclusions drawn from post-structuralist criticism, although the intense debate over the possibility of ob-

<sup>65</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens: Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert* (München 1998).

<sup>66</sup> Wolfgang Knöbl, *Die Kontingenz der Moderne: Wege in Europa, Asien und Amerika* (Frankfurt a. M. 2007).

<sup>67</sup> Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Die Vielfalt der Moderne* (Weilwera 2000); Christof Mauch, Kiran Klaus Patel (eds.), *Wettlauf um die Moderne: Die USA und Deutschland 1890 bis heute* (München 2008).

<sup>68</sup> Hochgeschwender, *Amerikanische Religion* 11–31.

<sup>69</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge 2007), examines the religious roots of modern secularism.

<sup>70</sup> Wolf Lepenies, *Auguste Comte: Die Macht der Zeichen* (München 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Franziska Schößler, *Einführung in die Gender Studies* (Berlin 2008) 14–20.

jectivity in science and the humanities is far from over<sup>72</sup>. All this led to considerable insecurity concerning what anyone could declare to be modern at all in the emphatic-normative sense. To a certain degree, this insecurity was present from the start, built into the historicist heritage of the modern discipline of history. Already in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, historians were discussing the a priori and universal claims of enlightened reason. The crisis of historicism (Ernst Troelsch and Karl Mannheim) after the end of World War I and the temporary turn toward prioritizing structuralist-synchronic, social-scientific analysis could not really work against this modern skepticism of modernity. With the cultural turn, which contained within itself a renewed historicism, the earlier reservations among historians surfaced again. The insecurity was then considerably increased by the pressure to find academic positions, and not only in the United States. Given the number of scholars, which had multiplied since the nineteenth century, who competed for a reputation and living on the academic market, periodic revisions of historical images and interpretations are inevitable, as this is the only way to guarantee attention and thus success within academia. Endless repetition of tradition, no matter how “correct” it may be, is clearly less promising in comparison. All of these factors accumulated to create the current historiographic view of the Scopes Trial. Even if individual accounts, especially Paul Conkin’s well-documented, methodologically meticulous monograph, are only slightly or not at all saturated with post-structuralist topoi, still, the factors discussed above made the quick reception of the results of such revisionism possible.

Even the new narrative of the events of 1925 is not free of critical objections. I would like briefly to point out two aspects which are important for the acceptance and even for the construction of revisionist narratives. Regarding the “new religious history” in general, Darryl G. Hart<sup>73</sup> and Dennis Martin<sup>74</sup> have already addressed important points. Among other things, they oppose the methodologically problematic consequences of a consciously decentralized historiography that lacks criteria for assessing relevance and plausibility. Indeed, this results in preoccupation with those considered “marginal”, “foreign”, or “different”. This raises the question of whether one is simply reproducing the attributions of alterity from past eras, only this time reversing the normative guidelines. Furthermore, perhaps too much weight ends up being ascribed to fringe problems such as “Dominion Theory” or “Christian Zionism” within the context of fundamentalism. But above all, particularly in the context of the debates of the 1920s, there is the danger of devaluing the fears expressed by contemporaries – predominantly liberal,

<sup>72</sup> *Bruno Latour*, *Wir sind nie modern gewesen: Versuch einer symmetrischen Anthropologie* (Frankfurt a. M. 2008); *Lorraine Daston, Peter Galison*, *Objectivity* (Brooklyn 2007); *Richard J. Evans*, *In Defense of History* (New York 1997); *Werner Paravicini*, *Die Wahrheit der Historiker* (München 2010).

<sup>73</sup> *Darryl G. Hart*, *The Failure of American Religious History*, in: *Journal of the Historical Society* 1 (2000) 1–31.

<sup>74</sup> *Dennis Martin*, *The Stillborn Rebirth of American Religious History*, in: *Journal of the Historical Society* 1 (2000) 57–65.

urban, and elite white males – over the forms and contents of both revivalist and fundamentalist religiosity, thereby of marginalizing this crisis in retrospect. It would be absurd to rewrite the end of the liberal-enlightened master narrative of modernity into a master narrative of a posthumous marginalization of socio-cultural elites.

At the same time, the loss of criteria for plausibility results in the danger of crossing methodological borders, on one side toward the natural sciences, on the other toward theology. The justifiable attempt to see that justice is done to the fundamentalist position and to avoid becoming prisoner of the ideological one-sidedness of liberal modernity discourses does not touch upon the question of scientific plausibility of fundamentalist arguments. In fact, this methodological humility will result in giving context to justified criticism of fundamentalist modes of argumentation when they enter the field of the natural sciences. Although it cannot be a task of history to determine the validity of statements concerning the theory of evolution, the controversial and many-sided objections from the natural sciences should be taken into account more strongly in the context of the new paradigm. This holds as well for theology. Conkin, for example, shows a tendency to sharpen the contradiction between evolution theory and revealed religion altogether, without taking into account the results of recent exegetic, apologetic, and dogmatic research<sup>75</sup>. This approach rules out any possibility of compromise from the start<sup>76</sup>. From an exegetic point of view, Conkin finds himself on a slippery slope, because he leaves the impression that fundamentalist exegesis is so-to-speak the royal road of theology. But that was never the case. It was precisely the fundamentalist attempt to interpret everything literally in the sense of pure, positive historicity that was the genuine product of classical modernity<sup>77</sup>.

All in all, however, these objections do not affect the revision of our image of the Scopes Trial, at least against the background of current theoretical and historiographic discourses over modernity. A renewed inspection and understanding of the existing source material was urgently needed, in order not to fall again and again for old Enlightenment myths of the rationality of modernity. One could hardly avoid sometimes overshooting the target. Only in this way has it been possible to see fundamentalism as it is on the deepest level: a product of modernity, multi-faceted, continually unfolding, always reinventing itself.

<sup>75</sup> From the evangelical perspective, *Alister McGrath*, *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life* (Malden 2000). From a Thomist position, *Martin Rhonheimer*, *Neodarwinistische Evolutionslehre, Intelligent Design und die Frage nach dem Schöpfer: Aus einem Brief an Kardinal Christoph Schönborn*, in: *Imago Hominis* 14 (2007) 47–81.

<sup>76</sup> *Conkin*, *When All the Gods Trembled* 1–21.

<sup>77</sup> For a multi-faceted history of Biblical exegesis, *Henning Graf Reventlow*, *Epochen der Bibelauslegung*, 4 Bde. (München 1990 et seqq.). *Brevard S. Childs*, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis 1993) ch. 2, offers a thoroughly pluralistic exegesis of the creation story from an evangelical perspective.

## Summary

In „The Scopes Trial in the Context of Competing Modernity Discourses“ geht es im ersten Teil um eine Revision der bis in die 1990er Jahre vorherrschenden Sicht des „Affenprozesses“ von Dayton 1925. Hatte man lange daran festgehalten, dieser Prozess habe im unmittelbaren Kontext der Dichotomien von Stadt und Land, Moderne und Antimoderne, Aufklärung und Gegenaufklärung gestanden und sei gewissermaßen die finale Schlacht zwischen protestantischem Fundamentalismus und aufgeklärter Moderne gewesen, so hat die neuere Sicht ganz andere Schwerpunkte gesetzt. Insbesondere wurde auf den urban-intellektuellen Charakter des frühen Fundamentalismus ebenso hingewiesen wie auf wechselseitige Fehlwahrnehmungen sämtlicher Beteiligten vor Ort. In einem zweiten Schritt wird dieser allmähliche *paradigm shift* dann sowohl wissenschafts- wie gesellschaftsgeschichtlich näher verortet, wobei insbesondere auf das analytische Potential der neueren kulturanthropologischen und postmodernen Historiographie im weiteren Kontext des soziokulturellen Wandels der USA seit dem Ausgang der industriellen Hochmoderne hingewiesen wird.

