Response to Readers’ Comments

Dear James,

Many thanks for giving me the opportunity to respond to the reports. I outline below the expansions and additions I propose in light of the readers’ suggestions. I found these suggestions very helpful and I am happy to enrich the text accordingly. Please convey my thanks to the reviewers.

(1) Reviewer 1 recommended a more explicit engagement with the term “theology.” Following this suggestion, I plan to elaborate on my use of the term in the introduction (mainly on pp. 5-6). I will say that (a) I do not use the term ‘theology’ to refer to a specific discipline or as a fixed, substantive, category but as a general term for matters pertaining to transcendence, divine law, revelation, redemption, and God; and (b) I see the term’s meaning as dependent on its use and function as disclosed in the discussion in the four chapters of the book. I found the reviewer’s pointing to Hans Blumenberg’s approach (mainly in his *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*)helpful because it takes theology to mean a type of response to (and born out of) existing historical and social conditions. I therefore plan to discuss Blumenberg’s conceptualization of theology in some detail and to elaborate on it as a reply to Karl Loewith’s secularization thesis and as an understanding of the role of religion in modernity. I believe that this expansion of my discussion will also help me to better clarify my approach to the difference between theology and religion that regards the latter as an extension of the former, as the reviewer rightly observed.

(2) Reviewer 2 suggested that the explanation in ) about why I decided to discuss specifically these texts and themes needs to be elaborated. I therefore plan to develop this section of the introduction further by providing a more thorough explanation of my choice of these texts and themes (Freud’s examination of jokes, Benjamin’s early theory of youth, Adorno’s concept of education, and Arendt’s engagement with tradition). I will argue that these texts illuminate central theoretical concepts and concerns of these authors such as Freud’s engagement with law and “law-giving,” Benjamin’s social criticism, Adorno’s negative dialectics, and Arendt’s definition of a modern-secular “new order of the world.” I will also flesh out what I identify as the fundamental questions and problems associated with these thinkers, and how the selected themes and texts help in understanding them. In doing so, I believe I can offer a more precise and elaborate explanation of my approach, as requested by the reviewer. At the same time, I will also clarify that I have not set out to provide an all-encompassing interpretation of these thinkers’ entire oeuvre, but to trace the different critiques of theology they introduce, and how these relate to their intellectual legacies.

(3) Reviewer’s 2 main concern was that the introduction needs greater precision and clarity about what critique is going to mean for “this tradition of figures.” This, I think, translates into a request for a clarification of the possible “secular” forms of critique in the twentieth century, taken up, modified, or developed by these figures. I agree with the reviewer that further elaboration of this topic would help clarify a central concept of the book and is especially relevant to following the discussion of Kant’s “critical path” (pp. 9-13). I plan to add a detailed examination of two central forms of “secular” understanding of critique: The articulation of critique as a rationalistic technique of scientific analysis and the characterization of critique as a kind of uncovering procedure. Reviewer 1 correctly suggested that both forms are central and I will expand my discussion on why these are indeed the two main forms of critique taken up by Freud, Benjamin, Adorno, and Arendt. This will also enable me to explicate what features of theological thinking and religion are at stake in the articulation of secularization as a “disenchantment” of the world, and how exactly critique is taken to be “secular” in relation to these features. This further analysis of critique, combined with the explicit engagement with the concept of theology (as suggested in point (1) above), will enable me to offer a more detailed clarification of the book’s main concepts and claims, as requested by reviewer 2.

(4) Finally, reviewer 2 invited me to elaborate further on the meaning of a theologically informed critique in the context of the variety of concrete social and political issues discussed mainly at the end of each chapter. I will enrich the examination of critique in Freud’s defense of a secular-modern culture (pp. 76-77), Benjamin’s rejection of all forms of political authority (pp. 118-120), Adorno’s reaction to the German student movement in the 1960s (pp. 175-176) and Arendt’s shift from “demonic” evil to evil that she reframes in “secular settings” (pp. 226-231). Given the reviewer’s particular emphasis on Benjamin and Arendt, I will illustrate what critique means by expanding my discussion of these two thinkers’ different articulations of “political violence” (pp. 116-119 and pp. 214-219 respectively). Since this particular theme preoccupied both scholars (Benjamin in his “Critique of Violence” (1921) and Arendt in her “On Violence” (1969)) it can, to my mind, illustrate rather well what the different critiques of theology may mean when translated into concrete political categories. Here, Giorgio Agamben’s early work “On the Limits of Violence” (1970) may be helpful to the discussion because it is a good presentation of the theological sources of Benjamin’s attraction to (for him messianic) violence that lies “outside the law” as well as of Arendt’s contrasting differentiation between the power of the state and the violence of revolution.