

# Lombaard's categorical invitation for minority dissent against 'suspicion': How real is the 'religious' in post-secular context?

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In the broader context of post-secularism and Lombaard's contributions, needful of philosophy, this minority report lights upon an analytic-post-secular crossover. Here, responding to Lombaard's categorical quest for the 'religious', philosophy serves to support greater realism in the discourse of the philosophy/sociology of religion so that we might better consider social, spiritual and philosophical capital. By small means, focusing on ontological, relational, democratic, psychological, social and analytic features of the humble category, it is suggested that an attitude of mitigated realism serves best in relief from suspicious theoretical pasts.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** This article attempts to demonstrate how post-secular categories like that of the 'religious' are enriched in post-analytic engagement with European philosophy and what this might require of theory.

... a universe comes into being when a space is severed or taken apart ... by tracing the way we represent such severance we begin to construct, with an accuracy and coverage that appears almost uncanny, the basic forms underlying linguistic, mathematical, physical and biological sciences, and begin to see how the familiar laws of our experience follow inexorably from the original act of severance. The act itself is remembered, even if unconsciously, in the first attempts to distinguish different things in the world where, in the first place the boundaries can be drawn anywhere we please. At this stage the universe cannot be distinguished from the way we act upon it, and the world may seem like shifting sand beneath our feet.

Although all forms, and thus all universes, are possible, and any particular form is mutable, it becomes evident that the laws relating such forms are the same in any universe. It is this sameness, the idea that we can find a reality which is independent of how the universe actually appears, that lends fascination ... and can show us something of the structure in which all creation holds, [it] is no new idea. (Brown 1969:1)

## Introduction: 'So what's in a category?' – A jocular point made serious

Against normal academic practice, this article begins with a nubby joke, for the good of reason. It goes: 'What is the difference between a Pilot and God?' In reply it claims: 'God doesn't go around thinking He's [*sic*] a pilot'. Whilst teasing pilots may on occasion be funny, it is less easy to tease the second categorical *Ultimatum* in an extraordinary comparison! The humour rests in an artfully forced, instantly appreciated mistake (*absurdum*) and transgression of 'culturally cogent' (Lombaard 2016:2) assumptions, connections, norms and values, in a testy fashion about philosophical *relatives* and *absolutes*.

No doubt ridiculously attributed, the joke tricks us into confrontation with endangerment of sanity, sin against the category and the uproarious result of disobedience. The joke works seamlessly in more than some social circumstances for its versatile applicability to pilots, doctors and philosophical *relativist* 'pots', calling *realist* 'kettles ...'. Even in the jocular sense, the category is a weighty weapon of reasoning, culture, science and society. Asking, 'how weighty?', is the task of this small musing. Thus to begin, by noting that the fleet-footed appreciation of the joke (in some contexts) demonstrates how a number of ontological, epistemological, semantic and social relations are assumed and referenced in common reception.

Merely from commonality, it does not stretch imagination too far, for us to understand that categories are conceptual building blocks in culturally and analytically cogent chains of reason, definition sentences in science and so on. However, the proving thereof eludes capture.

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## Defining a category?

Returning to the jocular experience, more than the clear semantic and other social links proposed by the joking, is a thin veiled assumption of *realism*, grounding our humorous and categorical effect. For our purposes, the joke instructs the quest for a broad working definition. We may read 'category' to mean:

- An assumption, type, concept or distinction which acts as a link in a set of conceptual (perhaps ontological, but certainly moral and scientific) relations, capable by their constitution of producing a sustainable chain of reason between definitions, theories, sciences and meta-theory, which they protect as *quasi* (minimal and falsifiable) arbiter, from numerous possible mistakes, contraventions, transgressions and confusions, endangering reason thus contextually understood.

## Realism and relativism in contemporary post-secular context

In minority dissent from Van der Merwe's convinced relativist majority claim (2016:1)<sup>1</sup>, it is taken here that a principled *realism* has come into social theory (Bhaskar [1979] 1998:25–43; cf. Schreiber 2015:4), where 'the sense of problem has now shifted from ideas to reality itself' (Luhmann 2012:5).<sup>2</sup> In this analysis, categories and classes of things arise in the world, which are differentiated in differentiation to other classes of things and they should never be confused or conflated ( Kant 2014:68–69)!

In the post-secular chain of reason and social theory, however, categorical placement is more slippery. Notably, therefore, there is common consensus that extra caution should be taken in appreciating a 'real' difference between absolute ontological 'apples', relative discursive 'science of apples' or relatively absolute 'Apple Brand'. In short, we need a clear view of *real* differences and relationships between ontology and epistemology. Alternatively, the results for methodology, clearer thinking and future construct of social categories could be disastrous (Kant 2014:1). Consequently, categorical investigations continue to be helpful and liberating (Bhaskar 1980; Bhaskar & Hartwig 2012b) in elucidating Lombaard's religious quest and Van der Merwe's (2016) phenomenology.<sup>3</sup>

## A matter of differentiation, but in a context of relations

Whilst appreciating that things basic to knowledge, like logical connections in discourse exist, they serve as categories (if at all) differently from others present in further degrees of

1.Though also to agree with Van der Merwe (2016:2) that 'Spirituality ... is understood differently from different perspectives'.

2.Thus, Bhaskar (2002c:xxxvii) claims semiotic rearrangement is necessary: '... so that we have the immediate identity of being and meaning, reality becomes meaningful ... we have the displacement of meaning, signification onto reality itself so that things in the world mean things and are constituted semiotically and interpreted hermeneutically in a multiplicity of ways. The world becomes a meaningful text.'

3.Included here Van der Merwe's (2016) 'internal-external aspects' (p. 1), categories of 'lived experience' (p. 2), 'semantic networks' (p. 3), 'passive' and 'active' dynamics (p. 5), 'people' and 'things' (p. 6), 'discernment' (p. 12), 'concrete nature' (p. 13) and 'divine-human' (p. 16) conversation, respectively.

relativity, for instance, in constructs like 'post-secularism', other 'patterns' (Bateson 1979:16, 17, 20, 22; Bateson & Bateson 1987:8) and 'tropes' (De Man 1978:1, 17–19, 23–29). Nevertheless, realist assumptions include that categories exist ontologically; extend into epistemology; are practical in society, even when practically silly in semantic, creative and spontaneous play (for some, and there with limits controversially), because (wisely) not every distinction we make is a category; neither an epistemology nor is fetishable in any universe (Brown 1969:1). Consequently, in constructing a post-secular category or relational category (Bhaskar [1979] 1998:41; cf. Schreiber 2015:4) of use to Lombaard's 'religious', beyond naturalist constraint,<sup>4</sup> a great deal of subtlety and ambiguity must be allowed to emerge into the social *realism* begged.

As indicated in this post-secular context, identifying the analytically available mistake or the offended rule of difference or misunderstood similarity in; ontology, concept or distinction, upholding the relationship between those oft doubted 'religious' and 'secular' social products (in post-secular and Lombaard 2014a, 2015d, 2016), is hard-pressed. Nevertheless, it is argued here that a relational analysis (that accommodates and hosts contradiction in transcendental relationships) from as far-a-field *Systems* theory, *critical realism* and post-analytic philosophy, serves well. Here, these sources are garnered to compose some 'minority report'.<sup>5</sup> Value chains and chains of reason converge on the humble category, as Lombaard (2016:1) begs for his 'greater realism' (2015d:1), signalling a more balanced response to the extreme relativist and suspicious hegemony of previous learning.

Furthermore, it is argued that a philosophical attitude of *relational realism* is adequate for Lombaard's category, post-secular discourse generally, investigation of trends suiting *secular versus religious* debate in sociology of religion, and to some benefit of contemporary spirituality studies.

## Placement of the category in post-secular debate

Where post-secular debate seems uncertain and suspicious about placing categorical status to social reality, one suspects it exceeds reasons of healthy scepticism, because it soon evidences a 'theoretically helpless embarrassment' (Luhmann 2012:12), 'irrealism' (Bhaskar 2002b:33, 2010:xxvii, 77) and 'suspicion' (Lombaard 2016:1). In diagnosis, the *impasse*

4.See Bhaskar's ([1979] 1998:2) quest for scientific 'unity' amidst the influence of 'scientism' and 'reductionism'. Also, Bhaskar ([1979]1998:3, 53, 80) has it: 'In particular it will be shown that *ontological, epistemological and relational* considerations all place limits on the possibility of naturalism (or rather, qualify the form it must take); and that these considerations all carry methodological import.'

5.Though establishing any such thing as a clear 'minority' in the historical progress within the philosophy of religion, is problematic (Long 2000:105) we 'can' as many have, look back on linguistic hegemony and fundamental approaches and in the sociology of religion (Dillon 2003) and see in them certain deficiencies, now beginning restoration of balance to epistemological attitudes. In part a minority, dissenting and critical voice in epistemology, incomplete; naturalistic accommodation, and; a generally perceived paucity of literature, it is nevertheless indicative of deeply spiritual resonances in world science, coming out of that enclosure into spirituality circles. In this context, the report is 'minor' in so far as it is 'incomplete' without acknowledging the larger engagement, Lombaard's exegetical and hermeneutic contributions have received (for instance with Farasani 2013) and numerous other respondents (Lombaard 2014b:477, ft.31).

inhabiting secular-religious relations in social theory is largely the heir to classical *realist* and *mentalist* closure of categories (and facets of being) and ideology of dichotomous opposition.<sup>6</sup> This, exacerbated by deconstructive closure on categories, in some similarity (and much dissimilarity, for some) has come into *Systems* debate on *operational closure* (Brown 1969; Bryant 2011:138–146; Luhmann 1990:7).

## Categorical closure in post-secular context

Patently visible in post-secular closure 'plague' (Unger 1987:55), for instance, Beyers' (2014) categorical realism and social scepticism has it, not only the 'religious' (p. 3) but also Augustine's 'transcendent-immanent' (p. 4), Durkheim's 'sacred-profane' (p. 5), Berger's 'subjective-objective', 'appearance-disappearance' (p. 7) and Habermas' 'reason-faith' (p. 10) are of a *relative* nature and therefore fail categorical status. So, whilst obviously apples and bricks plainly indicate different classes of ontology or categorical things, constructs, dualisms and opposing claims in post-secular debate do not.

This version of things not only acknowledges a 'difference' but also 'winters' it into categorical isolationism. In which case, post-secular discourse (its relational categories, distinctions and values) is left bereft of a chain of reason. In similar theoretical stalemate, we face the challenge that the religious term or distinction (God forbid a category?, for Chaves) exists in a discourse where no claim to universalised secularism or religionism (Chaves 1994:750) is known to succeed and is exactly (in paraphrase) 'Why secularism *qua* thesis, failed'. Whilst post-secularism is rightly no friend of rampant *universalism*, the lesson to be gleaned from *secularism* is that without a clear category, argument is limited in some way. Whilst that Agenda sought the marginalisation of religion,<sup>7</sup> it found itself unable to offer a cohesive definition to isolate, nor marginalise.

Ultimately, Chaves believes the secularist argument failed to differentiate, universalise or cohere in any sense approaching a category. In pursuit of some structural realism, however, he immediately (not originally) adopts a power analysis. Even so, this but proves there *can* be no categorical winners except regionally and therefore

6. Bhaskar and Lawson (1998:3–15) and Archer (1998:ix–xxiv) comment on the human sciences during the 20th century that it evidenced a number of dichotomies between 'hyper-naturalistic positivism and anti-naturalistic hermeneutics'; 'individualism and holism'; 'structure and agency'; and 'facts and values'. Also (Bhaskar [1979] 1998) 'reasons and causes' (p. 87), 'mind and matter' (p. 97) and 'society and nature' (pp. 97–98). See also Unger (1987:40). In Hsieh (2002a:167), the 'mother' of all dualism appears in Plato's *Parmenides*. There it appears as a 'body-soul' split that spawns the 'suspicious theory of two substances', which has under-structured science and methodology, politics, Church history and noted critically in Merton (2003:1, 6, 19–23). Although neat and appealing to the traditional, the orthodox Distinction, whether in philosophy as in religion, has certain complacent 'world without end' status. Nevertheless it does not escape the challenge that, upon these grounds alone, categorical judgment has little else to say but to the *distinction* between *absolute* or *relative* states of affairs and on the 'other', not much to say at all, thus suspending it into a dis-incarnate status.

7. In this regard, Roof (2003:138) makes the case for a clear distinction between 'Religion' and 'religious' noting that the latter is adjectival, as is not the more 'objective' former. The categorical and linguistic point made, however, the distinction is less clear in the social realm where adjectives attract pronouns, predicates and legal ontology, take up high offices and the like. Nevertheless, Roof clearly points to an ambiguity in widespread usage and appreciation of the category.

uncertainly. Nevertheless, the *relational* dimension is obvious to the argument and to the post-secular extent (in *caveat*) that categorical identities and possible virtues are important for any ontological, ethical, existential, reflexive or spiritual transformation of society (Bhaskar 1993:223–366, 2012:127–129; cf. Schreiber 2015:3).<sup>8</sup>

## Categorical unity and ambiguity

Rather, in post-secular minority reply the analytic and conceptual *unity* of (nevertheless faceted) *being* and *knowing* picks up a 'joined up' (Benedikter & Molz 2012:29–74; Bhaskar 2010) resonance, in challenge to isolation hegemony. Therefore, *this* reply more than experimentally (among so many engagements and inter-sectional multi-disciplinary kisses that make paradigm<sup>9</sup>) proposes a cogent chain of reason at ontological, epistemological, ethical, semantic levels of interest and analytic necessity. Wherein contemporary discourse, a post-secular architecture of knowledge encroaches upon *unity* of science, being and ethics (Bateson 1979; Cat [2009] 2013; Kant 2014; Luhmann

8. For Bhaskar, social categories operate in a cube of relations states. These are firstly attitudes; secondly, attitudes to attitudes and further attitudes to those which mediate intra-psychic, trans-personal, institutional and cultural items and transactions in fundamental and unpredictable openness exhibiting transcendental possibility. Upon transcendental conditions, we are able to produce, reproduce and transform relations, contracts, constructs and categories (their 'reality' so taken). Merton's (2003) categorical argument is that, without a sense of category we can neither say 'I am' (p. 4), have a sense of natural unity (p. 3), nor the possibility of discerning a 'true' and 'false' self. Nevertheless, contemplative transformation ultimately requires a mature detachment from the personal category in order to overcome dualism (pp. 1, 6, 19–23, 39).

9. The 'relational value chain' (Segal 1991:83; cf. Schreiber 2015:3) or paradigm of post-secular significance breathes its inspiration from a multi-layered and disparate epistemological uptake of (for want of a better expression) 'spiritual' resonance. From historical perspective, a loss of spirituality came to characterise Western 'Production', heir to the marriage between technology, Protestant work ethic, liberalism and capitalism. Spiritual thirst in a soon to be post-Colonial World, evidenced an East come West migration of non-Christian Spirituality. Centered on the principles of Eastern 'Non-duality' and Western 'non-separability' – relational themes soon to be taken-up in conceptual Sciences, though differently, in what (Du Toit 2016:1; Fox 1989:316–319) calls *New Cosmology*. The re-awakened resonances of 'unity and holism' in retrospect have become epistemological decentred 'wild-fire'. In the Western sophistication of post-modern critiques targeting: Reductionism, mechanism, positivism, mentalism, dualism and dichotomy, disenchantment, anthropocentrism, hegemony, patriarchy, extreme individualism, alienation and dichotomy, finds epistemological confluence and intimacy with a more complex Eastern wisdom and de-colonial promise. Among many religious and secular examples, these discourses indicate a (rough) movement seeking the liberation and protection of being, knowing and acting for the common good, on ideological and epistemological grounds. Meanwhile, cultural, traditional and ecological resonances beckon 'spiritual capital' in community and practicality. The post-secular analytic wing of study, therefore, confronts issues converging on the 'ontic', 'relational' and 'spiritual' turns of epistemological and social trend. None of these 'turns' are to *extremes* (affecting the secular and religious), but to a return of *balance* in mature post-modern 'return' to *being*, particularly highlighting the *relationship between being and knowing*. Some see this balance in notions of *relativism*, others in a mitigated ('critical') *realism*, all for good reason (Gerricke 2006:49, 52, 53–55) perhaps? Nevertheless hackles still rise, in debate. However, what becomes clear to some is that the grand literature of Relativism has no *essential* problem with Reality, nor its 'assumption', but with *Representation* and *Interpretation*, namely *Reception*. Immediately obvious for epistemological appreciation, *Relativism* is an approach applying directly to the epistemological realm; its rules of engagement should not impose on Reality nor *Realism*. To make such 'capture' is to commit 'Epistemic fallacy' (Audi 1998:324). However, it is precisely the realm of epistemology that must provide the post-secular analytic chain of reason capable of bridging dichotomy (if not duality) of mind-body problems (Bhaskar [1979] 1998:98; Van Gulick 2009:40–73; cf. Schreiber 2015:2; Hsieh 2003; Kant 2014). Furthermore, such analysis should deliver a self-conscious examination of philosophical conduct. To this point, the quest for *categorical realism* is of the moment. Notably, such analysis exhibits post-analytic trend for it includes possibilities of *synthesis* (Bevir 2001:4). To understand such might require adoption of a type of contradictory and incomplete sense of Holism (Jackson 2003:ix, 5–13; *contra* Bryant 2011), connecting the enduring and spiritual 'self' with a 'cosmological totality' (Van Ness 1996) to renegotiated social realism. These conceptual links, or their lack, 'say something not only about the world but about me as a reasoned [ethical] person' (Audi 1998:2) and show here an ethical intention in argument. The pertinent (minority) literature here indicates that a 'relational' reading of the World and Knowledge practices seems to fit Kuhn's (1962, 1969) paradigmatic requirements. These in short are categories proposing new relations; concepts and metaphors describing new relationships; analytic, critical, methodological and scientific 'traction', enough to hold interest of a wide community, who buy into a *techné* and *Zeitgeist* of understanding. More so, Du Toit (2016:1–2) suggests for 'axial' context.



2012:9; Merton 2003:3<sup>10</sup>), it proceeds in the midst of 'ambiguous' (Van der Merwe 2016:1; Van Ness 1996:4) divergences and confluences in plurality or multi-complexity of social content (reason enough, to request some categorical surety?).

## The post-secular, post-analytic point

The relativist point made (if we agree that *relativism* disputes only one thing, namely *representation* of reality), Bhaskar's ([1979] 1998) (critical) categorical realism asserts that *assuming* the *reality* of categories does not exclude differing types of *necessity* and *endurance* for those categories that exist in open societies, emerging nature and expanding cosmos. Presence of *differing* categorical types does not exclude a justifiable connection in chains of reason, nor constitute a 'mistake' (Bhaskar [1979] 1998:36–38; Kant 2014:69–79), but constitutes *ontological* emphasis. For this reason, Bhaskar proposes, ontological or not, social categories exhibit relative endurance and deserve the categorical appellation.

It is therefore clear to Smith and Medlin (1981) that the classical reading on categories is a poor servant of complex discourses and realities, because it is *unable* to 'handle all concepts' (p. 26), *excludes* 'disjunctive concepts' and 'unclear cases' (p. 29). This is of notable pertinence to post-secular debate 'unclear' as it is about whether one concept is a subset of another – as might indicate the case between *secular*, *religious*, *mystical* and *spiritual* categories. Whatever the case, in order to negotiate socially categorical being, we must challenge Western classical and mentalist assumptions that being and knowing are *closed* to each other. They are firstly ontologically *inseparable*, and that they are conceptually distinct, does not challenge the point. The post-secular analytic wing is set to challenge theory itself.

## Lombaard's analytical realism

As Lombaard (2016:3) comments on religion, in what is clearly a realistic assessment, it never *really* disappeared and is 'everywhere'. One is free to consider that when a social expression of being fails to disappear generally, any proposal that the theoretical representation of the category should dissolve is delusional. Especially so in the blatant visibility of religious bells, books, candles, practice and the lived experience of religious spirituality, R/religious communities, et cetera. We may participate or not, are present or not, but do not hold that on these grounds alone that the Religious *is not*. Absence is not always a clear categorical case. Consequently, many assumptions linking false chains of reason or hegemonic agendas require 'unmasking' (Beyers 2014:5).

## Eking categorical realism for a solution?

By invoking the category, Lombaard (2016:1–2) obviously not only invites controversy (is thus 'mired') but also arguably

10. Here Luhmann (2012:9) has it, 'The only option is to regard human beings in their entirety, body and soul, as part of the environment of the societal system'.

evidences a slow embrace of realist assumptions, remote to his 2014a writing.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, even if a confirmed postmodern mentalist there, Lombaard is not spared Tanney's (2007) analytical challenge. Unravelling and re-connecting assumptions in post-secular context neatly places a deserved emphasis on the *relational* aspects of a category.

## Post-secular relations, democracy and transcendence in Systems metaphor

Upon these grounds, the *Systems* 'approach' recommends itself eloquently (if boastfully) for all social and epistemic systems (e.g. Bausch 2001; Bhaskar 2010; Bryant 2011; Jackson 2003; Luhmann 1990, 2012; Winder 2004). It readily participates in the discourse on social realism and takes note of subtleties formally under positivist taboo. Commenting on *closure*, Bryant (2011:149) notes, that whilst categorical closures of distinctive natural types exist, *any* form of distinction relies on the existence of at least two pre-existing relationships: The first, a *democratic* relationship with other systems and the second, a *transcendent* relationship with environment. Furthermore, Bryant (2011:158–159) has it that natural systems accommodate contradictory elements and much more so in social systems. Therefore, social differences are contextualised by a transcendent and democratic 'unity of entities'. Consequently 'dissenting' (Van Ness 1996:12) or contradictory entities are not irreconcilably *alien* nor to be excluded. It begs the suggestion that such a system of entities and categories is 'unified' in the emergence by a bigger category that is likely, over time.

Consequently, from naturalist metaphor (if permitted) and there with provisions (Bevir 2001:14; Bhaskar 2010:1–7; Bhaskar & Lawson 1998:3, 6–7, 53, 82–83; Lombaard 2014a:1), *neither* apparent contradictions in reports, nor in social expressions, nor ambiguity, nor Lombaard's use of the (2016:3) 'or not' qualifier, is anomalous. Furthermore, nor do these deny categorical self-standing, for they exceed content. In possible challenge to Lombaard (2016), Bryant's *democratic* insistence in relational ontology bares consideration. Here, the *secular* and *religious* stand only in virtue of the democratic relationship between them as objects in discourse and messy, unpredictable society.

If we are to discern (one doubts) a 'suspicious' treatment of the secular in Lombaard (2016:2–4), Bryant's sub-categorical accommodation suggests that so-called 'secular' systems are inextricably, dualistically and dialectically involved with the 'religious', at many levels of agreement or dissent. The insight tempers unmitigated flights of epistemological or institutionalised autonomy or exclusivity. Though visible, traditional separation of secular or religious institutions does not taboo the more practical post-secular amalgamation of secular or religious transgression in their spaces nor the spaces of everyday life, not always a comforting thought.

11. Although an attitude of ethical realism is characteristic in Lombaard's (2014b:484) contribution.

## The categorically painted lily

In analytic consequence, when one category is chosen or elevated above the others of informative partnerships, it becomes a painted lily, or 'epistemic fallacy' (Audi 1998:324) to 'haunt' us (Luhmann 1990:25; cf. Bryant 2011:158; Slotte 2013:210; cf. Schreiber 2015:7) with its implied partners in contradiction. Is Lombaard's 'religious' to haunt post-secularism and its capital with the 'secular'?

The corrective that Systems debate may claim, (keeping ontological priority in environment) is that what distinctions 'do', is to uphold a *relationship* by way of *distinction*. Real distinctions, therefore, uphold relational fabric in reality, theory, practice and philosophical discernment. Discursive (semantic) *distinctions* uphold the epistemological relations of discourse, even when ambiguously used. Discursive accommodation seems to suggest that the *religious*, *mystical* and *spiritual* furnish each other with their distinctions, however, so held. These terms may not displace each other at whim because they share in the discursive environment democratically and transcendently. Lombaard, in his (2016:5) concluding 'humble-mumble', acknowledges the point.

## Categorical cultures

Democracy and contradiction accepted, Audi (1998:249–279) and Rolston (1996:387–413) seem to suggest (with differences) that both secular and religious are interrelated 'cultures' and 'justified belief systems' because they *have* categories addressing necessity and *deliver* analytic propositions and in some cases *a priori effect*. These allow for synthetic reasoning in practical life, even though they may be ambiguous about ultimate differentials. As chains of reason or reasonable faith (if ever separable), these cultures are able to critique and deliver explanation of the other, precisely because they inform (reveal) each other, as categorical family. Consequently we may not, as Van Ness (1996:6) notes, expect pristine distinctions between 'salvific' and or 'flourishing' paradigms. Dualism in this sense, seems neither to hold theological nor philosophical water. (It would be a very bad Christian theology that conceived of salvation without its existential *good* and no ethical philosophy would pose *none*.) In fairness that accepted, this does not relieve much spirituality debate as to the precise relationship between mysticism, spirituality and religion nor the fact that all participants, academic and social are free to change their minds, as we do and must.

## Transcendence, a truly capital category

A previously hinted 'reason' for our inability to settle *religious* as 'opposed' to *secular* priorities is because these are co-equal subcategories of something grander. Also these categories are extremely likely by Bryant's account (where hierarchies are minimal, if not flat), to accommodate elements or features belonging more classically in the other. Content it seems is not the reductive mark of categorical existence. The presence of *secular religion* makes the point, even when we do not

know its *sense*. Perhaps this is why Lombaard's (2016:3) religious claim to be sometimes 'or not' is not necessarily a self-contradiction, nor a mistake. It is enough to indicate that relationships between categories and subcategories, questions of 'which are which?', are not easy to identify in post-secular social space.

Where we are mistaken in our prosecution for relief, Bhaskar suggests, is in paying too little categorical thought to the role of *transcendence*. Especially valuable on this matter, Bhaskar's contribution to the philosophical transactional analysis of transcendent acts, may assist in grounding Lombaard's (2016:3) 'capital'. Whilst it is true that capital directly provides a larger pragmatic social category to stand cogently as metaphor and analysis, it seems to beg the inclusive question: 'On what ground-state, virtue or trait such capital comes to have effect that is not *only* religious?' As Bhaskar (2002a:12, 2002c:iv; Bhaskar & Hartwig 2012a, 2012b) has it, transcendence is a necessary condition for all transformations and mundane transactions and these are never exclusively religious.

However, what lies behind transcendental acts is a transcendental consciousness *whose* reflexive intervention is able to comment and formulate discourse on religious capital. In emphasis, thus 'whose' *receptivity*, *empathic* (Slotte 2013; cf. Schreiber 2015) discernment and *inner experience* (Merton 2003:1–15) is open for business, religious or not. If we need an ontological category for an ontological argument, one might consider *transcendence* (Bhaskar 2002a:10, 178–179, 181, 2002b:ix–xi, 2002c:ix–xi, xxxii–xxxiv, 67–171; 2012:xiv–xxv, 145–148) and the role of virtue (Parker 2010:215–226). For this reason, one might find it less than satisfactory that the religious should count itself privileged to deny transcendent or spiritual capital (Lombaard 2015d, 2016:3) in the secular nor should it pompously 'appear' as the only conceptual respondent for categorical prosecution, in the grander debate.

## Transcendence and critical consequence

Not without reason, we can on ontological grounds target Taylor's (2007:542–557; cf. Beyers 2014:5) untenable and preposterous claim that (even the point made) 'the immanent frame' (of secular reference) permits no 'immanent transcendence'. In response, many (Kee 2002:25, 27–28; Beyers 2014:8) find themselves dumbfounded and Bhaskar (as noted) would go to a refinement of war to demonstrate the fallacy.

Just as Lombaard's (2016:5) religious future 'is not without God', so Bhaskar's alternate text is not without 'transcendence', 'self-realization' in 'non-duality', 'freedom', 'creativity', 'love' and 'non-reductive discourses on God' (2002a:181–188; 2002b; Bhaskar & Hartwig 2012a:145–164). For both thinkers conceivably, we are enveloped in reality (mystery), placed where 'immanent' and 'transcendent' categories must meet 'immanent' and 'transcendent' differentials, presumably meeting at *some* absolute (Bhaskar 2002c:xii, xxxii–xxxiv, 2012b:xiv, xxv)?

It is perhaps in the context of transcendence as virtue that the transpersonal boundary (of a Categorical 'I') is most meaningful. Whilst transcendence supports a primary categorical distinction to transgress, it is in the very act of transgression that confirms both the boundary and transition. Boundaries are perhaps better understood as 'trans-boundaries' or 'relations' that not only mediate categorical transaction, knowledge, production, reproduction and transformation (Bhaskar 2002a:12, 2002c:iv) in spirituality, mysticism and religion, but also secular reality.

## Presence and absence

In society, Lombaard (2016:4) suggests, the religious may or may not be seen as such. Nevertheless, in reception of Lombaard, one believes (hermeneutically) the religious category is social capital or presumed cultural loss (Lombaard 2016:2) by its presence or absence, respectively. Plainly at many levels, our psychological, epistemological, social relations (proximity even in invisibility) and identification with categories are pertinent. Nevertheless, it is emphatically Lombaard's (2016:1) categorical point that even in *absconditus* these categories do not dissolve. The *realist* assumption remains on grounds of philosophical faith (at least). Bhaskar ([1979] 1998:28; Archer 1998:190) is well received for noting, therefore, that ontological categories in their social presence attract relational pronouns, predicates, roles and consequences. 'Society' is an unpredictable but not a totally unreliable expression of being and relationships.

An 'appearance' or 'moments' (Lombaard 2016:1) of social interaction may assist in unhaunting a conceptual ontology from static text or textual fallacy. By which text of *being*, existence informs us *alethically* (Bhaskar [1975] 2008:xi, 1993:101–102, 214; 2002a:202–203, 1993:101–102, 214), analytically and critically. Notwithstanding doubts about the momentariness, contingency, arbitrariness of relations so derived or formulated, Bryant and Luhmann (Bryant 2001:149) agree that 'flashes' of information do happen under both naturally and less socially 'unlikely' conditions. Thus, for multiple (even if a minority) analytical thinkers, a displacement of pure theory or pure construct vindicates a truer picture of life that is ontologically excessive of sociological trends (not that these are unimportant, in the realm of knowledge).

The momentary perspective on *distinctions*, however, casts doubt as to any *weight* they may hold beyond their epistemological value. For good ethical and democratic reasons, they should perhaps *not* carry more. However, we all know of instances whence a distinctive flash reveals 'a universe' (Brown 1969:1) or 'self-realization' (Bhaskar 2002c:xviii), 'ground-states' (Bhaskar 2002c:14), 'suchness' (Bhaskar 2002a:ix–xi), 'revelations' and 'satori' (Merton 2003:7, 9) or a *lover*, in the categorically undeniable reality of *encounter*. In short a mitigated social realism sense upholds the reality of such encounter. Notions about relatively secular or religious social states of affairs are not categorically uninformative. However, importantly for the category is the

distinction between their structure and apparent events (Bhaskar 2010:3, 9) – they are linked and minimally necessary to each other in processes. From the perspective of structural realism we may reflect that though distinct, categories serve as something approaching ground-states in consciousness, as passive virtues and traits that participate in a unified experience of ontology and epistemology, namely an interaction between *capacity* and social *presence*.

## Psycho-epistemic dimension of categories

No doubt as many assume, there is an inevitable psychological relation to categories like institutions, policies, cultural items, movements and so on. The category is something on which, to make up our mind, in widely accepted commonality, vastly different from now discredited sociological 'apartheid ruled' (Mayson 2006:8) *determinism*. To this point, even though legislation has a social effect, we cannot attribute that effect without considering private motivations, pay-offs, liberation movements and the like. Neither sociological nor legal *coercion* (Unger 1987:49–54) is a clear case. They may be found religiously, and ethically objectionable, even when 'visibly' obeyed (Bhaskar [1979] 1998: 37–48; 1989:80; Slote 2013; cf. Schreiber 2015:5–6). In sub-verse, some ways of 'presenting' knowledge and self may significantly 'absent' majorly accepted norms, and sometimes by way of absconding.

Nevertheless, social and scientific transformation of categorical content is well known. Elderly categories change in theoretical content and newer ones emerge into the relational space between ontology and epistemology, begging some explanation of society and progress in science.<sup>12</sup>

If we take Lombaard's word that his religious quest somewhat exceeds the mentalism and deconstructionism of suspicion he targets, ultimately we are confronted with assumptions and analytic cost of *social realism*, replete with slippery, relational or relative states of affairs that nevertheless are 'taken' as real, because we common people experience them thus, in a post-secular, post-analytic, as opposed to a 'post-truth' age.

## The unity of transaction in common-sense

In a common sense view, Lombaard's religious category is synthetic ('compound' for Van der Merwe 2016:3) and is placed in an inferred chain of reason and meaning which takes for granted, numerous *capital* assumptions of ontological weight, like causative agents, a category of *transaction* and (presuming) some sort of social agreement

12. Noting, for example, that Einstein takes the Newtonian concept of *Mass*, to leave it forever changed in a new set of categorical relations and a veritable scientific 'revolution', Bhaskar has it (2010:3) that Einstein's adoption is 'unilaterally dependent' on Newton's 'more basic level' of understanding, thus Einstein's version is 'taxonomically irreducible' to Newton and ultimately is (in new explanation) 'causally irreducible'. Over time, categories are unstable and are falsifiable, but reorganisation of content, may bring a concept into disuse but never denies the overall structural value of categories.



(dare one say *Constitution*) to be transacted. May we presume like Tanney ([2007] 2015:1) that the causal power of the mental and ontological facets of being joins in some unity *in-and-of* social transaction, agreement, possible contradiction, receptivity and transcendence?

Here as Audi (1998) notes, (in possible understatement) even when not directly self-evident, categories are legitimately 'indirectly' to be inferred for the sake of a 'commonsense view' (p. 5). Whilst generalisations (p. 6) are not 'foundational' (p. 111), they are a 'way' of grounding (p. 6), *enough* to assume analytic 'truth' (p. 111) linking 'causal justification' and 'epistemological grounding'. Consequently, categories continue instrumental casting in analytic memory (as learning wheels of a more dynamic process of epistemic mobility) and have 'a certain minimal strength' (p. 317). Importantly, such information 'is a structure ... anchored both internally and externally to the world' (p. 324), in agreement with Brown. Thus, any quest for contemporary categorical realism depends on ontological and epistemological *balance* to say the least of *unity* or *reason*, *religious* or not.

## Danger, danger ...?

As South Africans know of social categories when imposed, they change relations – intellectual, social and economic – to put people at torturous disadvantage and at other times or places, not. Nevertheless, the instrumental imposition of social categories based on identity politics (Unger 1987:50), challenges natural intimacies and is thus, *far* from innocent (Klaasen 2016:1–3). So deployed, by a chain of 'reason', categories are alternately the source of atrocity, cruel jokes, permissive playfulness, silly rhymes, alternative marketing, terrorism and so on. There is a 'line'. Such categorical imposition is indeed for *learning* in a range of attitudes, not for *imposing mechanistically*, unless *playfully*, *ethically*, *lovingly* and only *sometimes* legislatively. Whilst it is obvious that all these ingredients of social and political life, mediate categorical understanding, continuously tests our *Constitutional* chain of reason and so on, it is the realist point that. Categories take their reference from and contribute to the text of cultural intelligence or lack. Including variations encountered, subverted, nevertheless read, felt, tasted and experienced, beyond one textual hegemony, into life and ontological reality.

## A conclusion of parts

Penultimately, one may pose the question: Where would existence and culture 'be' *sans* an appreciation of categories; practically, ontologically, valuatively, politically, or placed humorously by sleight of tongue, yet ubiquitously understood as imposing a *valid* social warning? How carefully we *place* categories is the critical, philosophical and moral point of interest that binds concern for philosophy, post-secularism and liberation! Refusing them is something of a lesser option, unless all conversation, love, knowledge, humour and post-secular discourse is reducible to *madness*, *deficit* or *incapacity*.

## So what is in the unity of a category?

If the above suggestion is an *uproarious* notion, it speaks of an *in-appropriation* of division, *misplaced* unity and *confusion* of categorical states fundamental to ethical, social and scientific reasoning. We as reasonable people may be *incomplete* but are not madness, deficit or incapacitated. Much that has bugged previous thinking finds itself in contradiction of post-secular, religious, analytic, critical and ethical cogency and a more *adequate* reading of the world, as we love it, namely categorically and irrevocably. Clearly, categories are rules of ontological and epistemological excellence, discerned in the passive and active aspects of 'lived experience' (Van der Merwe 2016:2) capable of negotiating an adequate *fullness* of virtue (something tight and elastic). Contemplatives, mystics and meta-analysts agree (albeit by a proud minority) that our categorical quest is important, should exhibit a playful unity between epistemology and ontology, so that we might encounter our own integration and presence in a relational context and often divided world.

No doubt many cultural approaches seek to explain or extrapolate a chain of reason that connects one concrete individual with the world. This actuality is a testament of a spiritually *real* thirst for integration, in slow embrace of some incompletely perceived 'totality'. The categorical quest may provide an impoverished sense of structural connectivity and prove a process. Yet mundanely, intra-psychically, existentially, intentionally, transcendently, trans-personally and socially, by secular or religious means, we navigate on highly elastic relations to less elastic categorical poles. These are in no sense *remote* to our existence as concrete singularities in public, institutional, cultural and scientific production, reproduction and transformation.

## Concluding implications

Quite rightly, in response to a history of 'Whitley' and wrongfully imposed suspicion, the politics of Identity *under-structures*, occasionally *over-structures* conversational, ideological and categorical background to *reason*. The categorical and historical context in which reason is structured and highlighted in aspects of contemporary South African discourse and consciousness, makes evident their ontologically cast seriousness. So too it indicates the seriousness with which to examine the virtue of social elasticity and resilience by placing a category *needfully*, *democratically* and gently. Epistemological placement of 'the category', though useful in a 'bendy' way, begs *transcendence* into *ontology* and receptivity of being. On these grounds perhaps the category is naturally placed as a masterful servant of reason and query. This minor philosophical contemplation of small things, points us to a way of undoing a false split in former debate. At what first appears as an unclear epistemological case or assumption, soon reveals itself very clearly in the negotiated reality of society. Thus categories, though due their social *minimalism* in social presentation especially, are precisely *that* due given by their ontological and social reality. The option for a softened social

realism becomes reasonable for a society in (transcendental) search for itself.

*Freedom* from a foreign way of imposing and learning categories no doubt is a virtue, as is their relative learning, recognition and therefore their value, for others. Reducing 'foreignness' to 'falseness', Merton suggests, beckons conversion (a process of inner learning) and Bhaskar, a spiritual turn. The argument here categorically participates in a valid chain of reason that includes faith, trust, transaction, and transcendence in a way that challenges the primacy of religion over 'other' alternatives. All such ways, traditional or not, of; transcendental, political, social and personal experience are not independent, not separable and are always negotiated in the accommodation of something foreign (present or absent). It may be said that a 'minority' sense of realism, reclaims; agency, encounter, challenge, powers of re-interpretation and a truer balance of reason, for the majority. In 'pause' for that reason, the 'religious' category should be well considered if never to be prescribed, perhaps.

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