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Zur Diskussion von Religion und Moderne im Ausgang von Joachim Ritter
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English Summary
Progress and Decay
On the Discussion of Religion and Modernity following the Philosophy of Joachim Ritter

In recent years, a growing interest has emerged in the history of ideas and intellectual discourses of post-war Germany. One of the scholars getting increased attention is the philosopher Joachim Ritter (1903–1974), who taught at the University of Münster from 1946 to 1968. This book examines several aspects of the developments in his philosophic thought and its relation to the theories of some of his students. The notable fact that a number of students that attended Ritter's Collegium Philosophicum became prominent in philosophy, law and politics themselves facilitated debates concerning the importance of this so-called Ritter school (›Ritter-Schule‹). But indeed significant philosophical differences appear, not only when comparing the thought of the different participants of Ritter's Collegium Philosophicum but also in Ritter's own philosophical considerations from the nineteen-forties to the nineteen-fifties, which may have influenced his students of that time.

Considering these developments and Ritter's former students' different approaches to adopting his thought, this book focuses on two main aspects. On the one hand it analyzes considerations concerning the relation of religion and modern society on the part of the respective scholars, and on the other hand it puts emphasis on authors like Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, Hermann Lübke, Odo Marquard, and Robert Spaemann. They were, among others, participants of Ritter's Collegium Philosophicum and involved in public debates on politics and religion, to some extent up to the present time. The differences among their philosophical positions question the supposed homogeneity of the so-called Ritter school and its common ground. Thus these differences reveal ambivalent modes of reception of Ritter's philosophy, while at the same time indicating ambivalences inherent in Ritter's own philosophy.

Following the introduction and a section that presents the history of Ritter's Collegium Philosophicum at Münster and the discussion concerning the so-called Ritter school in general, chapters 3 and 4 attend to the main issues of this study. At the beginning of Ritter's philosophic involvement with modern society, in the late forties, there is a questioning perspective towards his time, a critique of modernity reflecting the disastrous consequences of the war and the Nazi regime as well as the precarious prospects of the beginning cold war. Section 3.1 takes a closer look at how it was possible for Ritter to come up with an affirmative approach towards the modern world. Mainly in accordance with Hegel's ideas, Ritter reaches a theory of diremption (*Entzweiung*) that marks the mature form of his philosophy. There is a moment of ambivalence inherent in this theory that not only regards its evolution but contends within the concept itself. Section 3.2 examines Ritter's philosophy with special attention to his philosophy of religion. According to his general philosophical development, Ritter's critical stance towards modern society – e.g. following T.S. Eliot's reasoning concerning a ›Christian Society‹ – takes a characteristic turn coinciding with his stay in Turkey from 1953 to 1955.

Chapter 4 deals with the contribution of this philosophical ambivalence, in particular with regard to religion, to the different ways his students like Böckenförde, Lübke, Marquard, and Spaemann follow his thought. Section 4.1 traces Ritter's historico-philosophical thought concerning religion and modernity up to his critique of the contemporary use of the concept of secularization as supported by, for example, Karl Löwith and Friedrich Gogarten. On the grounds of this critique Hermann Lübke and Hans Blumenberg assessed the concept of secularization differently in the sixties, and Odo Marquard's then firmly anti-historico-philosophical approach represents the first distinctive differentiation and variation of Ritter's thought and must thus be examined in this study. Subsequently, section 4.2 analyzes Ritter's involvement in debates concerning the concept of value as contested in particular by Carl Schmitt. Ritter supports the critique of the value concept philosophically but does not follow the political and politico-theological implications of Schmitt. Accordingly, authors like Lübke and Böckenförde refer to the thought of Carl Schmitt in an explicitly liberalizing way. Aside from the discussion of the philosophy of value, this requires a closer look at the concept of Political Theology as it is subject of the debate of Schmitt and Hans Blumenberg. Section 4.3 eventually concentrates on the

controversies concerning the concept of religion and its philosophical importance. Functionalism and substantialism are keywords in this discussion that within the group of Ritter's former students is particularly associated with Robert Spaemann. His reasoning concerning Lübke's concept of religion indicates a farther-reaching critique of Ritter's approach and modernity in general.

All these aspects show that there are different ways of answering the tasks and questions Ritter formulated concerning philosophy, either positively in adoption of or negatively in distinction to his own approach. His theoretical ambivalences led the former students of his Collegium Philosophicum to develop various methods of differentiating his positions. Section 4.4 finally resumes aforementioned aspects in reference to post-war German debates on the question of religious presuppositions of liberal-democratic politics, particularly concerning Böckenförde's notable insight that the liberal and secular state for its own sake relies on presuppositions it cannot guarantee.