

Article

# Resonance: The Final Dissolution of Religions or the Last Stage of Secularization

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**Abstract:** Secularized societies allow for all kinds of expressions of human spirituality (or lack of it). However, both the established religions and the more fluid forms of spirituality seem to leave open a specific space for the religious experience as something that cannot be met in any other form of cultural expression. Rosa's theory of Resonance, we argue, has the potential to empty this specific space of religious experience, advancing secularization to the next level. To Rosa, a religious experience is no longer a unique form of human experience but a simple example, among others, of the variety of experiences of Resonance. Rosa, albeit inadvertently, reinforces Sloterdijk's analysis, according to which the traditional concept of religion is a misunderstanding that can be overcome. These approaches to religion open the possibility of a third stage in the theories of secularization. In the first, the Enlightenment proclaimed that religion was to be washed away by the impulse of the immanent frame of Modernity. In the second, Taylor, Casanova, and others showed that religion never disappeared and that Modernity merely enabled religious pluralism. In the third stage of the theories of secularization, religion will be seen as a redundant cultural product.

**Keywords:** secularization; Hartmut Rosa; resonance; Sloterdijk; anthropotechnics; immanent frame



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## 1. Introduction

The present study is an attempt at understanding the theory of Resonance by Hartmut Rosa and, especially, its potential implications. Our central claim is that Rosa's theory will reinforce the process of secularization, understood as the abandonment of the practice of Christianity, that we have seen happen in the Western world, especially in Europe. Our study leaves aside secularization as it can be understood in other contexts or continents.

We begin by giving an account of how Rosa's theory has been received so far among scholars. Some of them, such as Žalec and Laube, have expressed the idea that the spreading of Rosa's theory can potentially reverse the process of secularization. We defend exactly the opposite opinion in the next sections of our study, i.e., Sections 3 and 4.

In them, we offer our reading of Rosa's books. Rosa's theory, we argue in Section 3, describes Resonance in the same way that religious experience used to be described, but claims that it can be experienced through many axes or sources, religion being only one among others. Thus, Rosa is affirming that the religious experience is not essentially different from the aesthetic experience. To clarify these two concepts, we extensively quote Gerd Theissen, the prestigious Theologian, who, precisely, tries to argue that there is a difference between these two experiences, while Rosa never makes this distinction. In fact, Rosa conceptualizes Resonance in a way that makes it indistinguishable from the religious experience by drawing concepts and categories from theologians and philosophers of religion (Section 4). The idea that Rosa's theory is constructed through the intensive use of religious language will be key to arguing that it will contribute to secularization. In these Sections 3 and 4, we also make parallels between Rosa's theory—which, in the end, is a theory of happiness—and the dilemmas that the modern hedonists (Bentham, Mill) had to face when expounding their doctrines.

In Section 5, we propose a genealogical perspective on the theories of secularization during the 20th century, classifying them into three stages. Here, we introduce the importance of Taylor's concept of "the immanent frame". We argue that Resonance means the possibility of a new stage. In this stage, we can also fit Sloterdijk's theory about religion as anthropotechnics. That is why in Section 6, we establish parallels between Rosa's theory and the book *You Must Change Your Life* (Sloterdijk 2013). Both authors claim that religion is not what it seems. For Rosa, it is a way of opening yourself to Resonance, while for Sloterdijk, it is an immunological way to live and a search for personal improvement. In no case is it a way of accessing the great beyond, as both authors think that religion, despite its transcendent doctrines, can be fully explained within the immanent frame.

Finally, in Section 7, we argue that it is the fact that Resonance explains religion in the immanent frame that justifies our basic claim: the theory of Resonance will contribute to secularization. If Westerners believe that they are searching for Resonance rather than God (as Rosa claims) and that Resonance is provided by several sources (or axes), different from religion, they will not have a good reason to abandon the immanent frame they have been living in for a couple of centuries now.

We should probably clarify that the authors consider the conclusions of their study to be something to be feared rather than hoped for. Christianity is a treasure of the past that was certainly created and developed within a transcendent frame that Europe has now left. However, precisely because of that otherness, Christianity has something to offer. This study should not be read as fostering secularization but as an attempt to better understand its dynamics.

## 2. The Restlessness of the Religious

Rosa's sociological theory of "our relationship to the world" has been well-received by specialists in secularization. In general, they have seen it as an opportunity to re-infuse a tinge of religion into secularized cultures. As will be explained, the theory of Resonance is brimming with concepts that used to belong to philosophy and the phenomenology of religion. Thus, although religion never really left secularized societies, these authors, in general, have seen the theory of Resonance as an opportunity to re-educate the peoples of the West. One can find claims like this: "Viewed through a theological lens, Hartmut Rosa's sociological theory of human beings' relationship to the world expands the reality of a spiritual, transcendent experience" (King 2022), to the effect that people who become familiar with this theory will learn to see the world as a place fit for spirituality. In other words, the theory of Resonance, no matter how sociological it may be, can become the means of compensating for the Weberian disenchantment of the world: "Resonance is compatible with a fair amount of disenchantment of the world" (Costa 2020, p. 152).

Others have seen the theory of Resonance as an endorsement of the practice of mindfulness (du Plessis and Just 2022). Žalec (2021) describes the theory as leading to general support of the practice of religion and as a theory that, by making religion understandable again in a secularized world, will, by implication, help restore religion. Žalec (together with Laube 2018) thinks that Rosa's theory will help people understand religion as indispensable:

"The third finding is that Rosa's sociology proves the indispensability of religion and piety in the modern world and places itself in the service of creating conditions in which man can actually shape and develop their need for resonance, and therefore their need for religion".

At first sight, then, one would say that Rosa's theory had been very welcome. However, then, one meets the fact that on 23 September 2018, Hartmut Rosa gave an interview with Alexandre Lacroix, the director of the French "Philosophie Magazine". In it, the German Sociologist claimed that his concept of Resonance had created restlessness among religious people. Here is the quote (Rosa 2019a, p. 109):

“I consider the need to resonate as something prior to faith and religion; it is its origin, from my point of view, and that is what disturbs religious people in my approach to the matter”.

The restlessness comes from the fact that religious experience had been always taken as the reference and the culmination of all other kinds of existentially intense, meaningful experiences. The experience of God had always been interpreted as distinct since its object bore no comparison to any other. Because humans (the proverbial *Homo Religiosus*) were capable of an encounter with God, they could also have meaningful encounters with the world. All such encounters could only be interpreted as somewhat misguided attempts to hit the mark, as if, so to speak, they were *mystique sauvage* (Hulin 2007) or wild mysticism. Only the religious experience was the genuine article, and all the other experiences (such as the aesthetic experience) were simply half-way there.

According to Rosa, it was the other way around: it was because humans were capable of having meaningful encounters with the world that they were capable of God, but not only that. The world was already responsive in a precise way that had so far been attributed only to God. The world talked to us, provided that we had the right attitude towards it. Additionally, to top it all, it was not true that humans were searching for God, often unawares, as had been the traditional claim of the religious. In reality, they were simply looking for Resonance.

These were a few of the implicit claims of *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*. They were in sharp contrast with the traditional assumptions of disciplines such as the phenomenology of religions or philosophy of religions, which, in their own way, had always been trying to establish the difference between the religious experience and any other, assuming as a basic condition that the religious experience was unique (Fraijó 2001, p. 70):

“The phenomenology of religion also studies the religious phenomenon *qua talis*, that is, what is specifically religious about it”. “In other words, the phenomenology of religion ( . . . ) tries to capture ( . . . ) a peculiar field of reality, of a specific human world and irreducible to other possible human worlds such as the ethical, the aesthetic, and that of ordinary life . . . ”.

Rosa’s book made the implicit claim that no such “specific, irreducible field” of human experience exists. Someone had to react to such a bold idea, which implied that those great phenomenologists of the past were very misguided. One of the most remarkable responses was Gerd Theissen’s, the old and prestigious German Theologian. One of his articles, for example, tries to establish some differences between aesthetic experience and religious experience, thus retaking the old topic of the phenomenology of religion. The article that has been published in 2019 (Theissen 2019), seems to be an emergency response to the threat posed by Rosa’s concept of Resonance. In it, although he admits that “Aesthetic and religious experiences flow nowadays into each other”, he is clearly trying to preserve a “natural space” for religious experience, as distinct from any other experience in the other fields. Our relationships and dealings with the beauty of the world, art, or the past would then be merely variations of the aesthetic experience. Religious experiences, though, would always be different from the rest.

According to Theissen—and this would be the ultimate difference—in religious experiences, a binding imperative appears that is absent in the aesthetic experience. This means that aesthetic experience can transition into the religious field as soon as “its intensity is so great that someone thinks that he or she has to start his life anew”, but the difference remains. Only religious experience comes with the discovery of such an obligation.

Additionally, according to Theissen, the aesthetic experience does not go beyond the immanent pole of perception, while in religious experience one reaches the “transcendent pole”, a “will” to which we connect, although it remains hidden, just as the soul of another human being or a “will” can be reached through the reading of texts.

Theissen claims to have long been defending the validity of the concept of Resonance as a metaphor for religious experience, thus admitting that religious experience is indeed

an experience of Resonance. This leads us to the question, “How much Resonance does a person need?” Admittedly, religious experience is a specific type of Resonance experience. Then, is religious Resonance superior to other experiences of Resonance in any way? Can a line be traced separating higher and lower experiences of Resonance? Is religious Resonance more “resonant” than the other types of Resonance? Or is there one single kind of Resonance, whose source is, in the end, of no consequence?

We face here a similar problem to the one J.S. Mill faced in 1861 when discussing higher and lower pleasures. His predecessor, J. Bentham, defended that the highest achievement for society was to reach the greatest happiness for the greatest number, but was against any hierarchy of kinds of happiness, advocating a liberal–democratic principle that encouraged each one to choose and pursue their own happiness without the government or anyone trying to direct the people to the “right” pleasures. Rosa seems to be leaning towards Bentham’s side, as the German considers Resonance to be always good and desirable or “good *per se*”<sup>1</sup>. According to Rosa, a superior society is one in which the maximum Resonance or alignment is achieved among the greatest number of individuals.

Similarly, we are now faced with the problem of figuring out whether or not any kind of Resonance fulfills the aspirations and needs of humanity, or whether religious Resonance provides something that cannot be achieved by any other experience of Resonance. To make things worse, Rosa classifies the experiences of Resonance according to their origin (or their “axes of Resonance”) and puts together, in the same section, religion, the beauty of nature, art, and history. Rosa seems to indicate that what the aesthetic experience (nature, art, and history) provides is not very different from religious Resonance; they are all “vertical axes of Resonance”.

However, even if there was a specific form of Resonance, such as religious Resonance, that could not be equated to any other form and that provided something unique and unachievable by any other means of Resonance, the question of “how much Resonance does a person need?” would still hold. What Rosa does in his book is single out different places where to find Resonance, but not for a moment does Rosa suggest that one should become a box ticker and try to “catch them all” or that one should look for the highest forms of Resonance.

Quite the contrary, he seems to imply that, throughout their lives, people need a certain amount of Resonance to achieve a good life. They need, probably, a lot of Resonance, especially in the major crisis of Resonance that modernity is in. Regardless of the source, the question of what the best source of Resonance is—the question of hierarchy—seems to be beside the point for Rosa. Indeed, the wording “axes of Resonance” instead of “types of Resonance” already gives a powerful hint. As we will try to explain in the following section, for Rosa, there is only one kind of Resonance, and it is of a religious nature. Therefore, any source will do.

Thus, and this is the central thesis of this paper, organized religions are somewhat redundant. Resonance is intrinsically a religious experience that can be achieved through many “non-religious” sources. Organized religions are not providing any exclusive content or anything specifically different. People do not really need them. If Rosa is right in his phenomenology of the experience of Resonance, organized religions cannot be considered *the* source of Resonance *par excellence*. Additionally, this is precisely what secularization means. Secularization will be accelerated by the circulation of the concept of Resonance. In a certain sense, the theory of Resonance will be the booster and not the remedy to secularization, as Žalec or Laube claimed. To claim that people need Resonance, and therefore, religion, is a *non-sequitur*, as we will argue in the next pages.

### 3. The Variety of Experiences of Resonance?

J.S. Mill created a criterion to distinguish between superior and inferior pleasures. It was a criterion based on authority. If a person singles out a certain pleasure as superior to the others, then that pleasure must be considered superior. We all must listen to that person. Because his judgment is based on experience, and from the moment we do not

have the experience (because we have not felt the superiority of the appointed pleasure), we cannot partake in the discussion. In the same way that no one should ask an animal about the happiness that comes from acquiring theoretical knowledge, we are similar to mute animals in the face of an experienced person. We know nothing about his experience, whereas he knows it all. He is the only authoritative source.

Thus, if anyone would want to distinguish between the aesthetic and the religious experience and claim that the latter is superior, it would suffice for him to have experienced both and then single it out as superior. Luckily, Theissen proceeds more philosophically and tries to explain rationally why one (religious experience) is different from the other (the aesthetic). He even lays it out on a table (Theissen 2019, p. 685) (see Table 1):

**Table 1.** Theissen’s table of characteristics of Aesthetic and Religious Experience.

Characteristics of the Aesthetic Experience	Characteristics of the Religious Experience
Transparency: a real foreground becomes transparent, - for life, - for psychic intentions, - for spiritual realities.	Depth and transparency make an ultimate and transcendent reality appear.
Aesthetic experience interrupts everyday perception and action—with a return afterward to everyday life.	Depth Resonance interrupts life and questions human beings fundamentally: You must change your life.
The reality that appears visibly is - unreal in art, - fictional in poetry, - open to the beauty of nature.	The reality that appears visibly is the miracle of existence, that anything exists at all with Resonance in- the miracle of the existence of human beings- and the contingency of their actions
The beautiful is a <i>fata morgana</i> in the desert of life.	
The experience of the sublime, the grotesque, and the ugly corresponds to the <i>mysterium tremendum</i> , but art transforms it into a source for the affirmation of life.	Absurdity is a <i>mysterium tremendum</i> Experiences of Resonance and transparency are the <i>mysterium fascinosum</i> . Absurdity is fought against; we do not enjoy it aesthetically.
Aesthetically experience allows freedom and is without obligation. For this very reason, it expands life and understanding beyond our milieu	Religious experience obligates personally to conversion, and socially to group loyalty.

We chose to reproduce it not in order to discuss the merits of each point but to show the reader that Theissen defends religious experience as superior to aesthetic experience. They might resemble one another, but they are different. Furthermore, religious experience possesses certain additional elements that contribute to its superiority. Is Theissen trying to smuggle the idea that religious experience is the ultimate experience of Resonance and that its nature justifies a separate status for it? Probably. The word “ultimate” appears in the first section of religious experience; in the second, “depth Resonance” is opposed to “aesthetic experience”, suggesting that religious experience is deeper. The third section suggests that religious Resonance puts the person in touch with reality, while aesthetic Resonance only deals with unreality and fiction, only with mirages. Aesthetic Resonance does not seem to go beyond the *mysterium tremendum* described by Otto, while religious Resonance encompasses both the *mysterium tremendum* and the *mysterium fascinosum*. Finally, and more importantly, religious Resonance comes with the discovery of moral obligation, while aesthetic experience deals only with joy, freedom, and the expansion of life. Religious experience is deeper, more truthful, and more intense, and therefore, it carries a bigger potential for transformation for the person. Religious experience is the real thing.

Would Rosa accept the claim that the religious axis of Resonance provides a deeper and more real experience than the others? How does Rosa characterize the experience of Resonance? Is there a variety of experiences of Resonance, as Theissen intends, or, rather, is Resonance always religious in nature? A direct answer to this last question is provided by Rosa himself in his book (Rosa 2019b, p. 135):

“It may well be, for instance, that someone has always disparaged rock and roll music as meaningless, only—similar to the American disc jockey Alan Freed during an epiphany at a rock concert—to suddenly arrive at the certainty that it is only rock and roll, but it is “bigger than all of us”. “In such a case, a resonant experience becomes the impetus for a remapping of a person’s evaluative roadmap as such—there can be no doubt that Freed here came into contact with something that he experienced as an independent source of value”.

In his book, Rosa, following Taylor, operates on the assumption that every human being makes their own identity by creating a moral map throughout their life. The moral map is made up of “strong” moral evaluations. Each of our moral “strong evaluations” provides us with a stable identity, enabling methodical and consistent courses of action. “Strong evaluations” are the ones that tell us what we should consider definitively important, while “weak evaluations” are only the tastes, desires, and appetites we have from one moment to another. According to Rosa, Resonance is impossible without strong evaluations. Acting against them is difficult, and we do it only reluctantly. They do not spring from us, as desires and appetites do, but come from outside: “As these evaluations refer to something that appears important *as such*, the source of said value is always located *in the world*” (Rosa 2019b, p. 134). These places in the world are the ones that enable Resonance. Resonance can only happen when such strong evaluations are involved because these evaluations are different from tastes and desires. They can speak to us, while tastes and desires never go beyond the boundaries of our subjectivity. Hypothetically, if someone had no strong evaluations of their own and navigated through life with only “weak evaluations”, they would never experience Resonance. They would experience pleasure or pain, but they would never be “moved” or “called” by the world, which is the first element of the experience of Resonance.

Thus, for example, each one’s parents are normally a source of strong evaluations. We are, depending on our life stages, successively worshipping them growing up, annoyed by them during adolescence, seeking their approval during the early years of young adulthood, happy to be independent afterward, and moved to compassion for them when they’re old and withering away. However, all the time, a deeper disposition and deep attention towards them (the opposite of indifference) are clearly present. Our parents are always an “independent source of value” to which we pay attention. They are a source of “strong” evaluations. Our changing moods towards them are quite superficial and, in the end, not really meaningful. They are “weak evaluations”.

Therefore, for Allan Freed, the disk jockey in Rosa’s example, rock’n’roll music, thanks to his experience of Resonance, became an independent source of value, i.e., it revealed itself as something “important as such”. Allan Freed had to reassess his “strong evaluations”—the weak ones, as we can imagine, just followed automatically. The experience could be perfectly equated to a religious conversion. A source of value is revealed, and one feels the call to adjust his values to the source of superior, commanding value. One has to bow down in the presence of this source and reassess their beliefs and values because of its presence. One has to start liking rock and roll.

“The presence” alluded to in the experience of Resonance is only a matter of “our underlying cognitive map or the prevailing cultural interpretation of the self”. “It can be God (or a god), history, reason, class, or even nature or *art*”. (Rosa 2019b, p. 134) There is only one Resonance. Everyone will attribute the cause of their experience of Resonance to whatever they have in mind, to whatever their upbringing, their context, their present, their language and culture, and their past experiences have made available for them. For Rosa, whomever or whatever causes the experience of Resonance does not affect the essence of the experience. It must have been art that caused the “conversion” of Allan Freed. Alternatively, they might have been the gods of rock’n’roll.

Now, many religious people are normally upset by this kind of suggestion. They feel that the burning hedge does not compare to the rock concert. Because the burning hedge, they say, was the occasion for the Creator of the universe to reveal Himself. However,

they do not really know; they just believe it. All they really know is that Moses, then or at some point in his life, felt a calling that changed his evaluations, just as Freed felt a calling during the rock concert. For Rosa, since the beginning of Modernity, art, nature, and history have become encompassing entities that speak with their own voice and present existential demands, just as religion used to do. Hence his inclusion in the set of “vertical axes of Resonance”, with no fundamental differences among them.

#### 4. The Common Phenomenological Structure of Resonance and the Religious Experience

Rosa shapes his concept of Resonance after the model of the religious experience. Rosa defines Resonance as “encountering something inaccessible that speaks with its own voice and is experienced as a source of strong evaluations” (Rosa 2019b, p. 369). A phenomenologist of religion would say that that is the traditional definition of the encounter with God in monotheistic religions.

Resonance has four steps. The four of them are a requirement (Rosa 2019a, p. 100) for contact with the world to become an experience of Resonance. The first already makes Resonance fit into the mold of religious experiences. It is the “moment” of effect. “Something from the exterior world must affect me—a landscape, some music, a person, something that happens”. However, Resonance is not just noticing something happening around me. Rather, something around me is calling me. I cannot overlook it. It captures my attention. It is asking me to respond in some way or another.

Just as in the classical stories of vocation, one can find in the Bible, Resonance begins when one hears a call and cannot ignore it. Phenomenologically, it is identical to a religious experience and begins just like it. The reason why Resonance is Resonance and not ordinary or simple “perception” or “relation to the world” is that in Resonance, one perceives a will, some kind of willfulness behind the world (Rosa 2020, pp. 49–50):

“With this, we begin perhaps instinctively to understand why Schopenhauer saw all things as possessing *a will*. The concept of *willfulness* is perhaps best suited to conceptualizing this idea. It is the *willfulness* of Beethoven’s “Moonlight” Sonata that Igor Levit [mentioned previously as an example of Resonance] senses, that he enters into a mutual relationship that repeatedly eludes him, and the mountain climber’s relationship with the mountain is no different. Resonance means nothing other than that this *willfulness* is not simply fixed but changes dynamically, particularly in our encounter with it”.

How does Theissen characterize religious experience? According to Theissen, one can differentiate between aesthetic and religious experiences, precisely because of the presence of intentionality and the presence of a will (Theissen 2019, p. 690):

“In addition, we encounter a characteristic trait of religious experience that we have not yet considered: an intentionality( . . . ). In the order that has become transparent, a will appears that is directed at the human being”.

It is safe to say, then, that Resonance and religious experience have in common the two first moments: the calling and the immediate response. The second moment of self-efficacy refers to the direct reaction of the calling and is automatic. The person knows that they have received a call precisely because a certain reaction of their sensitivity, i.e., of their body, has presented itself. The way and the examples Rosa uses to describe these bodily reactions, seem somehow related to the “fear and tremor” of which Kierkegaard once spoke:

“Even if it is only an idea that triggers Resonance in us, it still has an effect on our skin resistance, breathing, heart rate, body tension, etc., for example by producing goose bumps ( . . . )” (Rosa 2019b, p. 452). The third characteristic is that Resonance implies a transformation. The call–response scheme implies that those involved in Resonance are altered to some extent; as it implies strong evaluations, it must produce noticeable changes in the person who experiences it.

Then there is the “uncontrollability” of Resonance. One of the most attractive aspects of the theory of Resonance is this final trait of the experience of Resonance itself: the fact

that Resonance cannot be produced at will. In the brilliant second chapter of his book *The Uncontrollability of the World*, Rosa states that the modern impulse of making the world available to humans, of increasing “the share of the world” in control of humanity, has four different phases: we want to make the world visible, accessible, manageable, and useful. Resonance could not be engineered in such a way or any other way, as it is uncontrollable. There is a disposition toward Resonance (and a disposition against it), but that is all anyone can do about it: Resonance cannot be forced. When it presents itself, it cannot be managed; there is no way of knowing what changes it will produce in those involved—we know only that there is going to be a transformation.

One has to wonder if the selection of specific words—visible, accessible, manageable, useful—were written having in mind the classical attributes of negative theology: God is invisible, inaccessible, unmanageable, and, therefore, impossible to be pressed into service. Thus, the effects produced by God in the soul are equally uncontrollable. Once more, we stumble upon strong indications that Resonance, as a concept, has been laid out in accordance with the traditional language used to describe the religious experience, precisely the religious experience in the field of monotheistic religions, in which God has the initiative to reveal Himself and speak to the soul, while the believer is left transformed but powerless to reproduce (or even to properly describe) his experience. The phenomenology of Resonance is shaped by the phenomenology of religious experience.

In Judeo-Christian mythology, there was a prelapsarian condition, a state in which humanity lived next to God, a state of innocence that was lost precisely at the moment in which humanity decided they wanted to be in control. In his book *Resonance*, Rosa seems to trace a similar itinerary. For him (and for a number of authorities he quotes), childhood is the age of Resonance; children epitomize the “porous self”—almost a precondition of Resonance—against the “buffered self” invented in the 20th century (Taylor). Indeed, Resonance (Rosa 2019b, p. 449):

“It is the primary form of our relationship to the world. All culturally established forms of life subsequently evolve from resonant relationships to specific segments of the world. Reifying, muting, and distancing relationships with the world are, by contrast, the product of social and cultural learning. They are a cultural technique”.

For Rosa, then, Resonance is the possibility of recovering a quasi-mythical state of innocence that is lost in the process of growing up. Although one can find the claim that “Resonance theory should by no means be misunderstood as a doctrine of salvation” (only because lasting and universal Resonance is both impossible and undesirable), one cannot but feel that such clarification must be made because of the ubiquitous use of religious language. Even if the clarification is made again with explicit religious language.

If the basic hypothesis of the book is to be accepted, then all our fears and desires can be traced back to the basic desire for Resonance and the basic fear of lack of Resonance; Resonance, in fact, the only thing to be desired by itself (Rosa 2019b, p. 119):

“From this we can conclude that although every desire is at bottom a desire for Resonance (and every fear a fear of Resonance loss), the ideal resonant experience is itself free from desire, insofar as desire always means striving to change, to transform, and to overcome one’s present state or situation, while a resonant experience carries its fulfillment in itself”.

Thus, Resonance is presented as the foundational desire of all humans and the goal of existence. Humans do not desire God, as was traditionally said by monotheistic religions. They strive for Resonance.

Then, if Resonance is what we want, can a difference be established between higher and lower forms of Resonance? Do traditional religions provide the best experience of Resonance? Rosa mentions a few times in the book the expression “deep Resonance”. The term would indicate that, although Resonance is one single experience, it does not always have the same intensity—deep as opposed to “shallow” or “light”. “Deep Resonance”,



though, appears, according to Rosa, in a number of different situations that are not always related to vertical axes. On occasion, he seems to be pointing out the mystical experience as a form of superior or deep Resonance (Rosa 2019b, p. 115), and in others, he uses the expression applied to a clear ‘church’ context (Rosa 2019b, pp. 261, 263); but then again, he also refers to the communion experienced by choir singers (Rosa 2019b, p. 64), or uses the term ‘deep’ meaning Resonance in general, in context of previous strong alienation (Rosa 2019b, pp. 189, 451); ‘deep Resonance’ also appears to mean ‘strong resemblance,’ as when Rosa compares the myth of Christian nativity with the myth of creation (Rosa 2019b, p. 202); ‘deep Resonance’ is also applied to friendship (Rosa 2019b, p. 213), the relationship with nature (Rosa 2019b, p. 276) or music (Rosa 2019b, p. 288). However, again, it is not particularly clear if ‘deep Resonance’ is distinct from other hypothetical kinds of Resonance, nor if it needs to be desired over these other forms, or even less clear if deep Resonance is to be achieved only through religion—one would say that Rosa makes no such claim at all. Quite the contrary, for him (Rosa 2019b, p. 297),

“This experience need not be religious in nature, i.e., it presupposes neither belief in nor even the existence of a transcendent or metaphysical power. Even vertical axes ultimately concern relationships to the *world*, not otherworldly transcendence, although what is at stake here is our relationship to the totality of what confronts us—what encompasses us—as subjects”.

If the question was ‘How much Resonance does a person need?’ it is clear that for Rosa, Resonance is a necessary ingredient of a good life, and therefore, resonant experiences should be present in everyone’s life, but with no regard as to the depth or the source of the experience.

Rosa’s main interest seems to be to prescribe Resonance indistinctively because, to him, Resonance is always good. His great problem, then, is to find a way to disqualify the Resonance that, hypothetically, a Nazi and a member of the Ku Klux Klan would find between the two if they were to have a conversation. They would probably resonate with one another when discussing, for example, the extermination of large groups of men and women (Rosa 2019a, pp. 107–8). These two men would be experiencing the world as “sustaining, nourishing, warming, and accommodating” (Rosa 2019b, p. 449) when discussing how to create hell for others.

Somehow, Rosa is facing the same problem that Mill faced when trying to prove that happiness was good (the only proof he could find was that people wanted it; see Mill’s *Utilitarianism*). One could also say that Rosa is stuck in the objection that Kant put to the idea of happiness as good: in certain circumstances, happiness can be bad (see *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*). Although religions do not have forceful arguments to disqualify the universalization of the religious experience proposed by Rosa in his theory, monotheistic religions will always beat humanistic theories that limit themselves to the immanent frame: the world alone seems to be unable to provide an undisputable, ultimate Good. The ultimate criterion for establishing right and wrong relationships with the world cannot be provided by the world alone. Apparently, our strong evaluations need to be based on something greater than our best but potentially misguided experiences of Resonance.

##### 5. The Total Decline of Organized Religion (Theories of Secularization)

Why has the modern prophecy of secularization not been fulfilled? Why was it that the technical and scientific paradigms had not replaced religions? Because people could not stop looking for Resonance, and the technical and scientific paradigm is the opposite of Resonance. Why, instead of the disappearance of religion in general, did we end up in a philosophical and religious *totum revolutum*? For the same reason, people looked for Resonance—not for metaphysical truth or orthodoxy. Why, after discovering that the world had been disenchanting, de-factualized, or reduced to a cybernetic paradigm after having been submitted to a one-dimensional reduction, had people not returned to traditional Christianity? Because they were not really looking for God but for Resonance. Resonance is what we are looking for. Not God or religion.

At this point, we should look at different theories of secularization because there is no doubt that Rosa's Resonance has implications that affect these theories. His approach, we believe, may be a new step in secularization. The theory of Resonance helps us understand what religion is and what it will become.

If we look at the twentieth century, we can find different genealogies (Casanova 2012; Costa 2022). There is also a lot of misunderstanding and theoretical problems that have led us to what has been called by Monod (2002) the *secularization dispute*<sup>2</sup>.

We should go back to the 18th century to find the first appearance of what has been called secularization (Monod 2002, pp. 24–31). The concept of secularization was used for the first time in the juridical field to designate the separation of property between church and state. A good is secularized when it becomes the property of the state. This term, typical of the field of law, was transferred to the social field to designate the process by which religion disappears from the public space, leaving the control of the institutions, and is circumscribed and relegated, more and more, to the private sphere. This process implies an increasingly clear separation between the powers of church and state, but it does not occur in the same way in Catholic countries as in Protestant countries or, obviously, in areas of Islamic religion. There are therefore different processes of secularization. (Casanova 2012, pp. 23–27).

This dynamic, which began in the times of the Enlightenment and is typical of Western modernity, seemed to predict the total disappearance of religion from the public space, as dictated by the motto "the more reason, the less religion". This is so in certain countries because of modernization, the rise of scientific rationalism, and faith in progress (Koselleck 2003, pp. 41–45). However, this first reading of the secularization process enters a crisis in the middle of the 20th century. On the one hand, due to the attack that is produced by political theology. Both Carl Schmitt, in the field of political philosophy, and Karl Löwith, in the field of history philosophy, postulated that modern ideas were nothing more than secularized Judeo-Christian ideas. These genealogical explanations of the appearance of the main ideas of modernity, such as sovereignty (secularization of God) or progress (secularization of providence), meant an attack on the legitimacy of modernity itself by making it into a debtor or a bastard stage of the previous Christian era. This generated quite a few debates. Blumenberg made an appearance in it in an effort to defend modernity, and other authors such as Marquard or Koselleck also intervened. These tricky debates on the relationships between religion and modernity remain open.

On the other hand, the crisis of this first reading of secularization as an irreversible process occurs when it is verified that, in truth, this process is neither uniform nor definitive and has somehow reached a point of stagnation. At the base of this criticism is the thesis of an author such as José Casanova, who, from a more sociological perspective, confirms that in certain areas of the world, religiosity does not decrease but rather increases. It does so sometimes hand in hand with politics (Iran), sometimes hand in hand with new social movements (Latin America), and in the most postmodern stage, hand in hand with the battle for recognition (Casanova 2012, pp. 181–84, 215–17).

Therefore, in the second half of the 20th century, a second stage was born. A stage that we can call post-secular, characterized by the recognition of the religious as an element that coexists with the most characteristic elements of modernity. The characteristic of this stage is the loss of power of the classical religious institutions and the rise of a religion *à la carte* and a diffuse spirituality that accompanies the construction of identity. The religious is understood as something more malleable, constructible, and variable (Costa 2022, pp. 31–53). This stage would be defined by the maxim, "the more reason, the more religious plurality".

Despite this, religion has been fully transformed. Although religion is not going to disappear as originally predicted, something has really changed. Is what Charles Taylor (2007) has called the "immanent frame". It consists of the understanding of the world in material terms, as something closed without any transcendent forces in it. Before modernity, people lived in a world where the natural and supernatural merged. This common ground

disappeared, and now the world seems to be only all that you can see and nothing more. Therefore, the world is no longer seen with a purpose or an end goal; it is just a system governed by rational laws that can be described. In the “immanent frame”, religion is still possible, but not as an explanation of the world but only as a personal choice or an opinion. This opens the possibility of living a meaningful life without religion and, obviously, without any institution that says what to do or believe.

Immanency is our common framework. What you see is what you get. In any case, the affirmation of transcendence is a personal choice. What draws many people to increasingly follow syncretic or plural religious phenomena is the search for answers to the question, “Is that all there is?” (Taylor 2007, p. 507), but the common ground, the obvious answer of our time, is: “There is nothing else”.

In this post-secular context, with the “immanent frame” as a backdrop, we receive Rosa’s theory as something new. Rosa also suggests that what you see is what you get: “Even vertical axes ultimately concern relationships to the *world*” (Rosa 2019b, p. 297). However, there is also Resonance. Resonance is neither exclusive to religious experience nor differentiated from it, as we have shown. This opens the door to the affirmation that we are in a “third stage” of the secularization process, a stage in which religion is not needed anymore (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Three stages of secularization as seen by the authors.

First stage	“The more reason, the less religion”
Second stage	“The more reason, the more plurality of religions”.
Third stage	“We have Resonance: we do not need religion”

The third stage is one in which we do not need any other hypothesis or anything different from the immanent frame. For a while, our hesitations could be justified: do we not need to consider the existence of a transcendent being with whom to resonate? What religions provide is not deeper and higher than any other human experience. Now, thanks to the Resonance theory, we know that the world itself supplies the Resonance we need to fulfill our religious needs. The immanent frame is justified even from a utilitarian perspective: it is possible to have religious experiences without religion. We already knew that, we already had experienced that (Hulin 2007), but now we have the theoretical frame that explains and justifies it.

Religion is not a way by which the soul resonates with its creator. Religion is not preparing us for significant encounters with God. Religion is a vertical axis of Resonance, i.e., a way by which we resonate *with the world*. Religion is a set of practices through which we can prepare for meaningful encounters with the world. Religion is a sort of technical procedure to sensitize ourselves for these (albeit uncontrollable) encounters with the world. As Sloterdijk suggests, religion is simple anthropotechnics. Before delving into the implications that Rosa’s thesis has for the future role of religion, let us look at this other contribution by Sloterdijk, also significant for these post-secular times.

## 6. Rosa and Sloterdijk

In the post-secular context described above, it is not only the affirmation of the existence of Resonance in Rosa that proves to be a threat to the singularity of religion. Other readings of religion also point to its disappearance. These are those that reduce religion to action without any kind of specificity within an exhaustive and general explanation of the meaning of all human actions. We will now analyze religion as an anthropotechnic in Sloterdijk and the similarities that we can establish with the proposal of Resonance in Rosa.

For Sloterdijk, the return of religion is a legend. This means that all those post-secular thinkers who affirm that religion returns because of the failure of the Enlightenment project have not really understood what religion is. There will be neither a comeback of religion nor a return to religion because, for Sloterdijk, there are no religions but only spiritual

practices, which he calls more or less organized anthropotechnics, which serve to develop our immune system.

In *You Must Change Your Life* (2013), Sloterdijk argues that human anthropology should be read as a set of practices and exercises to strengthen the immune system of the human being. This categorical view allows him to affirm what is to a large extent the thesis of this article: if such an operation of defining man succeeds, the victim of all this reflection will be “the conventional concept of religion” (Sloterdijk 2013, p. 4). For Sloterdijk, in this historical moment, it is not religion that returns but immunology. Religious practices are understood as one more layer of this immune system, and nothing more than that.

### 6.1. Religion as Anthropotechnics in Sloterdijk

Sloterdijk’s anthropotechnics is a system of practices and exercises that, under more or less ancient rituals, allows for the maintenance of the immune systems of human anthropology. Exercise would be synonymous with habit, repetition, and a virtuous circle in order to improve the action or operation of man in the world. For Sloterdijk, all religion, culture, and even work itself are part of an anthropological reading of man according to which man tends to seek repetition and exercise in order to first protect, survive, and then improve himself. If in Rosa, man is a being in search of Resonance, in Sloterdijk, he is a being on the way to self-improvement through exercise. According to Sloterdijk, the human being is not a rational being with the capacity for transcendence, nor a *homo faber*, but a living being that emerged from repetition.

Sloterdijk attacks belief in the existence of religions and faith. He tries to show that what we call religion has no consistency or substance at all that would allow it to be differentiated as a human phenomenon of its own. Religion would be replaced by “general asceticism”. There are no religions, only spiritual exercises. This can be claimed because religious, spiritual, or ascetic exercises are a set of immunological practices that allow the human being to overcome the uncontrollability of destiny, to face the unknown, the mysterious. It is a matter of optimizing through exercises the “immunological status” (Sloterdijk 2013, p. 10), no longer biological (proper of humans but also the rest of living beings), but symbolic. As long as we describe them as what they are, we will be able to detach these anthropotechnics of the symbolic layer of the human being from the institutions of power that control them and even make them better and more useful.

The explanation that there is something that transcends us is explained in Sloterdijk as a result of the immunological character of every biological species. This beyond, this transcendence, is evidenced in the recognition of a world outside that can be pointed out, differentiated, and named as a result of language in a different way than in the rest of the species. As a result, the human being aggressively relates to the world, just as Rosa explains that has occurred throughout modernity. Resonance happens in the middle of this modern dialectic between protection and openness to the world (Rosa 2019b, pp. 307–66).

There is in Sloterdijk an axiomatic proposition: that cumulative knowledge, as a result of man’s need to strengthen his immunological being, implies the possibility of progress, and that in the unfolding of all that was implicit, the project of Enlightenment is realized incrementally. Sloterdijk is incardinated in this kind of logic that allows us to affirm that his project is one more step in the direction of secularization, that is to say, to make rational, explicit, understandable, all that in religion was withdrawn, obscure, esoteric, and therefore the origin of manipulation in man (Sloterdijk 2013, pp. 6–7).

For Sloterdijk, there is direct communication between nature and culture. This is given in the immunological force that moves all the processes, the first less conscious (religion), the second highly conscious (secularization), but both operating in the plane of survival and protection of the human being to face the difficulties of life, of the world, and of others. In this sense, Sloterdijk criticizes certain dualisms between nature and culture in such a way that he considers the dialogue between both fields to be completely open, through life as an exercise. There is therefore not a natural world and a spiritual world, but one is the continuation of the other.

It can be said that if there is no religion but only spiritual practice and exercise, there are no believers and non-believers but exercisers and non-exercisers. This vision seems to be a direct interpellation of the already classic sociological classification proposed by Taylor (2012) between seekers and dwellers, giving rise to a new sociological classification that cancels the differentiation due to the recognition or not of a transcendent.

The religious practice would thus be nothing more than an anthropotechnic on the symbolic plane that helps humans face uncertainty and mystery. If this is so, the established religion does not add anything new. People only need to keep the practice or ascetic exercise that provides them with the control and security they need. In this sense, we dare to affirm that the rise of practices such as mindfulness or meditation, detached from any religious tradition, responds to this immunological dynamic described by Sloterdijk.

### 6.2. Similarities and Incompatibilities between Rosa's Secularization and Sloterdijk's

In Sloterdijk, there is the aim, just as there is in Rosa, of formulating a central element that allows the articulation and explanation of all human behavior. In Sloterdijk, it is anthropotechnics; in Rosa, it is Resonance. In this sense, both become catch-all concepts of omni-explanatory vocation, in which everything fits and is capable of giving a reason for all behavior, from the most natural to the most religious. Religion thus becomes an appendix to these explanations, just another compartment.

Sloterdijk himself goes so far as to support such a hypothesis explicitly: in the end, it could be that everything is a question of language. With the use of catch-all concepts, we change the language to refer to those practices that are invariant in all human anthropology—but we also change the language to refer to the place that such a practice occupies in a symbolic system (Sloterdijk 2013, p. 4):

“Our enterprise is no less than the introduction of an alternative language, and with the language an altered perspective, for a group of phenomena that tradition tended to refer to with such words as ‘spirituality’, ‘piety’, ‘morality’, ‘ethics’ and ‘asceticism’”.

One of the important differences, explained in Rosa's terms, results in the fact that anthropotechnics is a vehicle that seeks to increase man's control over the world. Human beings repeat their operations to improve their capacity for dominance, as a vehicle of aggression with respect to their exterior. They can also try to make way for Resonance (even though Resonance is uncontrollable). Rosa, through the description of Resonance, seeks precisely to open the category of uncontrollability. According to the thesis of Resonance, not everything can be brought under control; therefore, there is a limit to what anthropotechnics can achieve. However, even so, religion can be explained as a series of practices to make available this axis of vertical Resonance—at least, up to the point at which this is possible.

Both Rosa and Sloterdijk delve into our connection with the world and recognize religions as a mode of relating to the world. They both view religion as an anthropotechnic practice, emphasizing its role in shaping human existence. Resonance, according to their perspectives, is not solely contingent on the subject but can be cultivated and prepared. Sloterdijk stresses the immunological side of all anthropotechnics, including religion, while Rosa insists on the idea that our relationships with the world can be both aggressive and immunological and the opposite, i.e., resonant. However, the idea of Resonance also refers back to anthropotechnics: there is a way of relating to the world that is not immunological and that can be exercised—even if it is the final and desired product, Resonance, is ultimately uncontrollable.

In both cases, religion is not what it seems to be. It never was. It is simple anthropotechnics. The traditional concept of religion as the specific and distinct space of human experience in which humans enter into a relationship with what lies beyond the world is hereby overcome.

## 7. Religion as a Redundant Cultural Product

From this point, a few different historical developments can be foreseen. The first would be that the post-secular stage, i.e., the religious supermarket and the use of religion as a (political) identity within a predominant immanent frame, will continue as it is. In this case, religion will continue to be used as an anthropotechnic: people will choose whatever they find fit to help them through their daily lives or will adopt religion as an immunological identity to face an aggressive world. In this case, religion will continue to be a personal option in a secularized world. The circulation of Rosa's theory of Resonance will not drive people into organized religions.

Our contention, though, has been that another possible development can occur if Rosa's theory of Resonance is widely read and circulated. If we are to educate the younger generations as to what Resonance is, how it operates, its different sources, and its uncontrollability, it simply will not make sense for them to join any organized religion. They will be driven out of organized religions. The theory of Resonance will be the booster and not the remedy to secularization.

Rosa's theory, with its profuse use of religious language, gives the people of today a tool to look for what the people of the past found in traditional religions. If I accept the religious language of Resonance that Rosa is providing with his theory, I do not need to adopt the traditional language of religions. The claim that Rosa's theory will help traditional religions regain their lost ground is false, or naïve at least. The traditional language is rooted in a different frame than that of modernity; it is rooted in a transcendent frame that has been long abandoned by Western culture. Why should anyone de-root themselves from the immanent frame to adopt a traditional religion with its transcendent frame, especially if they have understood what Resonance is? There are other, better ways to explain the calling, the shifting of our strong evaluations, and the felt presence of a hidden will behind things—better precisely because the explanations are placed in the immanent frame. According to Rosa, people do not need to abandon the immanent frame in search of Resonance, and we just believe that they will not.

As Sloterdijk claimed, secularization is the process by which what was hidden is put under the light to be scrutinized and understood, a process by which whatever was implicit is now revealed. Rosa's theory of Resonance reveals that whatever organized religions can provide, it can be obtained by several other different means. Humans need Resonance, and if there are human experiences different from religion that can provide it, there will be no more need for religion. Rosa's theory shows that people just want to resonate with the world, and since there are so many ways and places to seek this Resonance, organized religion will be considered redundant. Sloterdijk saw religion as a set of anthropotechnics. Anthropotechnics will be taken from the institutions of power that controlled them to make them better and more useful; Rosa's book has just shown that it makes perfect sense to do so.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "I am convinced that Resonance is good *per se*" (Rosa 2019a, p. 106).

<sup>2</sup> *La Querelle de la sécularisation* in its original French, making clear reference to the dispute between the ancients and the moderns of the 17th century.

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