

Redemption and Reform in *A Secular Age*: Charles Taylor's Interpretation of  
Early Modern Protestantism



Nathan J. Wallace  
St. Peter's College,  
University of Oxford

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## Short Abstract

This dissertation presents a critical historiographical study of Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007), focused on his interpretation of early modern Protestantism. Its biographical research together with intellectual-historical analysis of Taylor's writings as a New Democratic Party politician and social theorist demonstrates that his "story" is intended to function as a Gramscian-Sorelian social myth to cultivate solidarity and subvert capitalist hegemony in the tradition of socialist humanism. The dissertation then explicates how that intention causes Taylor to misrepresent Protestant theology and experience. Its analytic foci include Taylor's phenomenological argument that John Calvin disenchanted the Lord's Supper, his reading of Richard Baxter's political theology as a teleological retrojection of scientific socialism and Stalinism, and the liberal pluralist philosophy of religion inherent in his interpretation of Jonathan Edwards's experience of redemption as a kind of "fullness". The underpinnings of Taylor's approach are clarified from his intellectual biography: his formative engagement with Catholic Personalism, Catholic Action, *Cité Libre*, the Canadian Social Gospel, the Student Christian Movement, and the "Canadian Fabians" while studying History at McGill University (1949–1952); alongside an examination of his role in the post-1956 formation of the British New Left at Oxford (1952–1961), observing his familiarity with the first English edition of Gramsci's writings, his rediscovery of Marx's 1844 manuscripts, and his appropriation of phenomenology from Merleau-Ponty. The dissertation critically elucidates how these sources (mis)guide his narrative construction by empirically falsifying Taylor's presentation of an intrinsic causal link between Protestantism and secularization through e.g., examination of Calvin's theology of the Supper with attention to his emphasis on the sacrality of the consecrated elements. The dissertation illustrates that an intrinsically theological, empirical ecclesiastical history committed to the ideal of

historical writing as literary mimesis more accurately represents Christian experience by writing a history of redemption rather than Reform Master Narrative.

## Long Abstract

This dissertation presents a critical historiographical study of Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007), focused on his interpretation of early modern Protestantism.

The first chapter introduces the thesis that *A Secular Age* is aptly understood as a Gramscian-Sorelian social myth as it is a contemporary Master Narrative that utilizes phenomenology to cultivate solidarity and subvert capitalist hegemony in the tradition of socialist humanism. Two aspects of *A Secular Age* are considered to introduce this interpretative thesis. First: the extent of complaint regarding the book's lack of clarity, which John Milbank noted could "disguise" Taylor's "radical" thought and the philosophy of religion that "lurks in the shadows" of his text. Second, it notes Taylor's peculiar conflation of Dominican preaching and Communist propaganda in his dialectical-teleological Reform Master Narrative:

If we see this attempt by an élite to make over the base as a kind of distant preparation for a world in which something like the Bolshevik party can emerge, then we can see the friars as a form of late-medieval agit-prop. (There are of course many intermediate stages, including later orders, like the Jesuits, then the Jacobins, etc.)

This was prefigured by Gramsci:

Marxism crowns the whole movement for intellectual and moral reform dialecticised in the contrast between popular and higher culture. It corresponds to the nexus of Protestant Reformation plus French Revolution.

After drawing several other parallels between Taylor's scholarship and Gramsci's prescriptions, the opening chapter notes Taylor's proximity to the first English edition of Gramsci's works, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (1957), published after the 1956 revelations of Stalinist tyranny, which was a vital source for the Marxist humanism of Taylor's circle in the British New Left. The chapter outlines the thesis that the unstated Ur-problem of *A Secular Age*, and Taylor's "philosophical anthropology" more generally, relates to the historical emergence of Soviet oppression as a manifestation of philosophical

pathologies inherent in historical materialism: reductionism and unanimism. By contextualising Taylor's philosophy in the light of his socialist activism, this dissertation interprets his work as also addressing internal dilemmas of socialist political theory. The first chapter draws from Michael Bentley's *Companion to Historiography* (1997) to give a historiographical precis of *A Secular Age*'s "view of historical knowledge; its idea of historical understanding; its doctrines about explanation; and its implications about method." This introduces methodological concerns regarding Taylor's use of phenomenology in *A Secular Age*. The chapter also explains that the dissertation does not attempt a global expositional-analytic study of *A Secular Age* but focuses its analysis closely on Taylor's interpretation of three Protestant Christians to illustrate the mythopoietic nature of his Master Narrative. Specifically, it examines Taylor's phenomenological argument that John Calvin disenchanted the Lord's Supper, his reading of Richard Baxter's political theology as a teleological retrojection of scientific socialism and Stalinism, and the liberal pluralist philosophy of religion inherent in his interpretation of Jonathan Edwards's experience of redemption as a kind of "fullness". The opening chapter also suggests that an ecclesiastical-historical account of Western secularization can only be written in the form of a *theologia crucis* and acknowledges that the study of Calvin, Baxter, and Edwards entails an autonomous work of theological retrieval.

The dissertation's critical historiographical analysis of Taylor's interpretation of early modern Protestantism is developed through an intellectual-biographical analytic narrative history, focused on the development of his liberal Catholic socialist humanist commitment. Chapter two therefore describe Taylor's family background, his upbringing in Québec, and his studies at McGill University (1949–1952) in the context of Canadian secularization. It considers the formative intellectual, political, and spiritual influences on his life during this period, including Romanticism, Catholic Personalism, Catholic Action,

*Cité Libre*, the Canadian Social Gospel, the Student Christian Movement, the “Canadian Fabians”, and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. Attention to these forgotten sources of Taylor’s thought clarifies why Stuart Hall (co-founder of the *New Left Review* with Taylor in 1960), described him as, “that even more perplexing phenomenon, a sort of Catholic Marxist”, when he met Taylor in the early 1950s. Chapter two examines Taylor’s formative years at the University of Oxford (1952–1961), where he was a French-Canadian Rhodes Scholar studying Politics, Philosophy, and Economics at Balliol College (1952–1955), and then Prize Fellow at All Souls College (1955–1961), where he wrote his D.Phil. thesis, “The Explanation of Behaviour in Social Science”. During this nine-year period, Taylor was vitally involved in the post-1956 formation of the British New Left through his friendships with “the small group of young communist undergraduates, centered around Christopher Hill at Balliol”. As a student, Taylor rediscovered Karl Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* and introduced this text to the British New Left. Previously unexamined archival material from Taylor’s correspondence with his stockbroker uncle, Senator Louis-Philippe Beaubien, who managed his finances during this period provides further biographical insight, including records of his considerable donations to the *Universities and Left Review* and *New Left Review* magazines. The chapter also considers the influence and unexamined political writing of Taylor’s first wife (m. 1956), Alba Romer (1931–1990), a Progressive Polish Catholic whose father had personally negotiated with Joseph Stalin (1878–1953) while acting as ambassador to the USSR.

Chapter three then surveys Taylor’s involvement with the New Democratic Party through the 1960s by considering themes of his unsuccessful election campaigns, and traces of Gramsci’s influence on the NDP’s *Manifesto for an Independent Socialist Canada* (1969), which Taylor signed. It also observes how Taylor integrated his political activism with his academic work through his involvement with the “Study Group on Foundations of Cultural

Unity” (which perceptibly supplied him with his theory of “excarnation”), his Slant Symposium address in 1967 (“The problem is to find a new basis for a radical socialism”), and in his contribution to a collection of NDP essays, where called for “a rewriting of socialist theory as complete and far-reaching as that of Karl Marx a hundred years ago.” It notes that at the 1987 *New Left 30 Years On* conference, two years before *Sources of the Self* was published, Taylor stated his interest in,

[going] back over that whole tradition of thinking which generated both our conception of persons as bearers of rights and the crippling ideology of individuals as purely autonomous, self-responsible thinkers. These are two flowers from the same tree, but I think you can redo the tree in such a way as to attain one of these and exclude the other.

It concludes that future engagements with Taylor’s genealogies of Western identity and secularity cannot overlook this ideological agenda inherent to his scholarship. The chapter draws to a close by considering his essay in the *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* volume celebrating his ninetieth birthday. On that occasion, Taylor exhorted his readers to “remember Antonio Gramsci’s ‘pessimism of the intellect optimism of the will’” and stated, “our future direction of travel ought to be clear,”

that we puncture the self-promoting ideologies of neo-liberalism and meritocracy, and replace them with a new and urgent sense of solidarity... And on top of this, a recovery of the multiple spiritual sources of solidarity, and a renewed sense of awe and wonder at the natural order which nourishes us.

Taylor’s prescription provides an apt hermeneutical lens for his authorial intent in *A Secular Age*. The chapter notes the parallel between Taylor’s Gramscian call and the work of Michael Sandel—his former student—in *The Tyranny of Merit* (2020). This evidence reflects a liberal Catholic socialist humanism as the guiding ideological thread of Taylor’s intellectual biography. His critical genealogy of Western secularism in *A Secular Age*—wherein early modern Protestantism was an “engine of disenchantment”—is primarily concerned with undermining conceptual and existential sources for the liberal-capitalist

order. The intellectual biography illustrates how Taylor acquired resources for a Gramscian historical work that has formulated a neo-Marxist critique of liberalism and secularism that is beguiling to some conservatives.

Chapter four examines the narrative contours and epiphanic aims of Taylor's "story" in the context of his socialist humanism, affinity for the Axial Theory of World Religions, and critical response to poststructuralist eschewals of the narrative form. It also considers how contemporary trends in critical historical theory (developed by "neo-Nietzscheans," in Taylor's vocabulary) express anarchistic impulses, within their intellectual-historical setting of Western secularization. The chapter delineates the redemptive example of ecclesiastical history as a contrasting witness to the integration of a meta-narrative with the empirical historical method; it also sketches a transcendental argument for the mimetic efficacy of historical narrative realism.

Chapter five begins with an exposition of Taylor's notion of "Secularity 3". It studies how Taylor developed his phenomenological approach to the secularization of the "background" of modern Western subjectivity, and delineates his utilization of work by Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Merleau-Ponty. Through a close reading of his exposition of *Hegel* (1975) some problems appear with Taylor's approach. Taylor noted that G.W.F. Hegel's ontology enabled him to grasp the "background" phenomenologically with conceptual clarity *as* the manifestation of Absolute Spirit. Lacking Hegel's ontology, modern philosophers and phenomenologists cannot *grasp* the "background". According to Taylor, they can only try to give an impression of it hermeneutically, and it is reduced to an "implicit sense". The chapter critiques the empirically elusive quality of Taylor's hermeneutic of secularization for utilizing phenomenology to discern historical causes. It also draws a connection between Taylor's methodology and Gramsci's suggestion that a popular presentation of Marxism should start with "the world conception absorbed

uncritically by various social and cultural circles in which the moral individuality of the average man is developed.” It emphasises that Taylor’s criticism of Calvin’s sacramental theology was prefigured by Christopher Hill:

Now the protestant emphasis on faith as against works, its denial that sacraments are the vehicles of grace, spiritualizes worship and strips it of its symbolical-magical-materialist character. Protestant sacramental doctrine bears the same relation to medieval catholic doctrine as credit does to a metal currency, Marx long ago pointed out.

Hill also argued that Reformed theology with its emphasis on covenants underlay modern political philosophy and social contract theory. The chapter notes that Taylor’s interpretation of Calvin as a disenchanter follows Marx’s critique of the abstraction and intellectualization of life from the 1844 manuscripts. Taylor’s narrative argued that Calvin’s Reformed sacramental theology abstracted God’s grace from the sacraments by intellectualization and thereby constituted an inaugural step in the long march to Western alienation in the modern “atomistic” liberal-capitalist order. The chapter then undertakes a retrieval of Calvin’s theology of the Supper and draws it into responsive dialogue with Taylor, Radical Orthodoxy, and Brad Gregory. First, it critically evaluates the evidential viability of Taylor’s claim that Calvin “disenchanted” the sacrament. Second, it responds to the line of critique developed by Taylor and Radical Orthodoxy theologians concerning Calvin’s semiotic theory by studying Calvin’s theology on the topic of the *manducatio indignorum*. Third, it addresses the apparent relationship between metaphysical univocity, nominalism, and Western secularism as it relates to Calvin’s doctrine of the Lord’s Supper.

Chapter six considers the atheism of Jacques Gruet (d. 1547) and historiographical trends in the study of unbelief to illustrate problems with Taylor’s conception of “enchantment” and seeks to illustrate the explanatory power of theologically unabashed ecclesiastical history. In this connection, it studies Richard Baxter’s experience of doubt and grace for insight into the nature of Christian faith in contrast with “enchantment”. It surveys

and analyses the various hermeneutical approaches to Puritan lived experience that supply Taylor's narrative. By examining his post-1956 debate with E.P. Thompson regarding Marxist humanism, it illustrates that Taylor teleologically prefigured Baxter's political theology as akin to Stalinism. Finally, the chapter notes Taylor's claim, "the Puritan felt called upon to treat the world as a disenchanted one, for the greater glory of God," in the context of his left-Weberian phenomenological critique of instrumental rationality but illustrates that Taylor's claim is empirically false considering Baxter's publication, *The Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits* (1691), written "for the conviction of sadducees & Infidels." The chapter illustrates the wisdom of Sarah Foot's historiographical injunction from her article, "Has Ecclesiastical History Lost the Plot?":

It is not the purpose of ecclesiastical history, or the study of any other religion, to formulate twenty-first-century social theory, still less to use anthropology to explain away confessional ecclesiastical history in such a way as to make the study of religion legitimate aspects of our own present, and thus to support current notions of gender, identity, liberal humanism, secularization or globalization.

Taylor's account of Christian history with the category "enchantment" yields a distorted representation because it is a constructive endeavour in contemporary social theory "to pursue the coexistence of diverse cultures" written from a utopian socialist rather than an ecclesiastical-historical perspective. On the contrary, an empirical and theologically forthright history gives insight into Christian experience, the nature of God's grace in Christ, and the perennial nature of unbelief.

Chapter seven has four parts. Part one situates Taylor's philosophy of religion in the context of his political theory. Part two explicates his sources for his notion of "higher time" and interprets that idea in the light of his revolutionary socialist vision. Part three examines the concept of "excarnation" in Taylor's philosophy with reference to the themes of alienation and enchantment. Part four studies two of Jonathan Edwards's sermons together with the *Religious Affections* (1746) to elucidate his theology of divine illumination and

draw some of the implications of Edwards's theology for Taylor's philosophy of religion and critique of bad faith. The chapter critically considers how Taylor's political theory entails totalitarian conformity around metaphysical pluralism. It also notes how his proposal for a pluralist *Heilsgeschichte* commits acts of misrecognition by his standard.

The conclusion draws out some of the implications of this dissertation's intellectual-biographical research for future studies of Taylor's *oeuvre*.

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Professor Joel Rasmussen. Sarah Foot's brilliant seminar on the Nature and Practice of Ecclesiastical History in 2018–2019 was a powerful source of inspiration that has been foundational for my subsequent research, and Sarah Apetrei wonderfully supervised my master's work. My doctoral supervisor, Joel Rasmussen, was the Socratic midwife and intellectual sparring partner *par excellence* behind the emergence of this dissertation. His insightful teaching was always marked by kindness, and I express my thanks warmly. Many friends also helped me to formulate these ideas: special thanks go to Dr Steven Firmin. I express my gratitude to my parents, Michael and Margaret, for generously supporting me over the years, not least financially, but also with thoughtful advice and prayer. My wife Sophie has been the sweetest partner in all this; she has discussed each of these ideas with me and kept me pressing on. For her unyielding love and support I am most grateful. Our children, Isabelle Monica and Isaiah John, have specially enriched my life with the joy of fatherhood in the midst of research. Finally, my late grandmother sent me an important note of encouragement related to this project as she meditated on God's sovereignty towards the end of her life. Listening to her describe the Resurrection and the Judgement of the Last Day are some of my earliest memories. She was also faithful to pray for my salvation during my adolescent profession of atheism. In this Theology dissertation it is right to acknowledge her influence, and to thank the Lord Jesus above all for forgiving my sins and washing away the guilt of such hell-deserving unbelief by his blood. It has been a privilege to study the history of God's people; it is an infinitely greater joy to have been made one of them. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

For Sophie.

## List of Abbreviations

- ASA: Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).
- CCF: Co-operative Commonwealth Federation.
- CLC: Canadian Labour Congress.
- CND: Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.
- CO: John Calvin, *Joannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. C. Baum et al., 59 vols. (Brunswick: Schwetschke, 1863–1900).
- FLQ: *Front de libération du Québec*.
- LSR: League for Social Reconstruction.
- MPOW: Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, trans. Louis Marks (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1957).
- NDP: New Democratic Party.
- NLR: *New Left Review*.
- PQ: *Parti Québécois*.
- RB: Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae, or, Mr. Richard Baxter's Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of His Life and Times*, ed. N. H. Keeble, John Coffey, and Tim Cooper, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).
- RIN: *Rassemblement pour l'Indépendance Nationale*.
- SCM: Student Christian Movement.
- SS: Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).
- ULR: *Universities and Left Review*.
- WJE: Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 73 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957–2008/The Works of Jonathan Edwards Online, ongoing).

## Chronology of Charles Taylor's Life

1931: Born in Montréal.

1939–1946: Attended Selwyn House School.

1946–1949: Attended Trinity College School.

1949–1952: Studied History at McGill University.

1952–1955: Awarded Rhodes Scholarship; Read Politics, Philosophy, and Economics at Balliol College, Oxford.

1955–1961: Awarded Prize Fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford; Wrote D.Phil. Thesis, “The Explanation of Behaviour in Social Science,” under Isaiah Berlin and Elizabeth Anscombe.

1956: Married Alba Romer.

1957: Co-founded *Universities and Left Review*.

1960: Co-founded *New Left Review*.

1961–1976: Appointed Assistant Professor of Political Science at McGill University.

1961: Co-founded New Democratic Party.

1962: Placed third in Parliamentary elections.

1963: Placed second in Parliamentary elections.

1964: *The Explanation of Behaviour*.

1965: Placed third in Parliamentary elections.

1968: Placed second in Parliamentary elections.

1970: *The Pattern of Politics*.

1975: *Hegel*.

1976–1981: Appointed Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at All Souls College, Oxford.

1979: *Hegel and Modern Society*.

1980: Michael Sandel, Michael Rosen, and Frederick Beiser complete their doctoral work under Taylor's supervision.

1981–1998: Professor of Philosophy at McGill University.

1989: *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*.

1990: Alba Taylor deceased.

1995: Married Aube Billard.

1996: Marianist Award Lecture: “A Catholic Modernity?”

1998–1999: Gifford Lectures: “Living in A Secular Age.”

2007: Awarded Templeton Prize; *A Secular Age*.

2008: Awarded Kyoto Prize.

2015: Awarded John W. Kluge Prize (shared with Jürgen Habermas).

2016: Awarded Berggruen Prize.

2019: Walter-Benjamin-Lectures: “Democracy and its Crises”; Awarded Ratzinger Prize.

2020: *Reconstructing Democracy*.

2022: *Degenerations of Democracy*.

Figure 1.

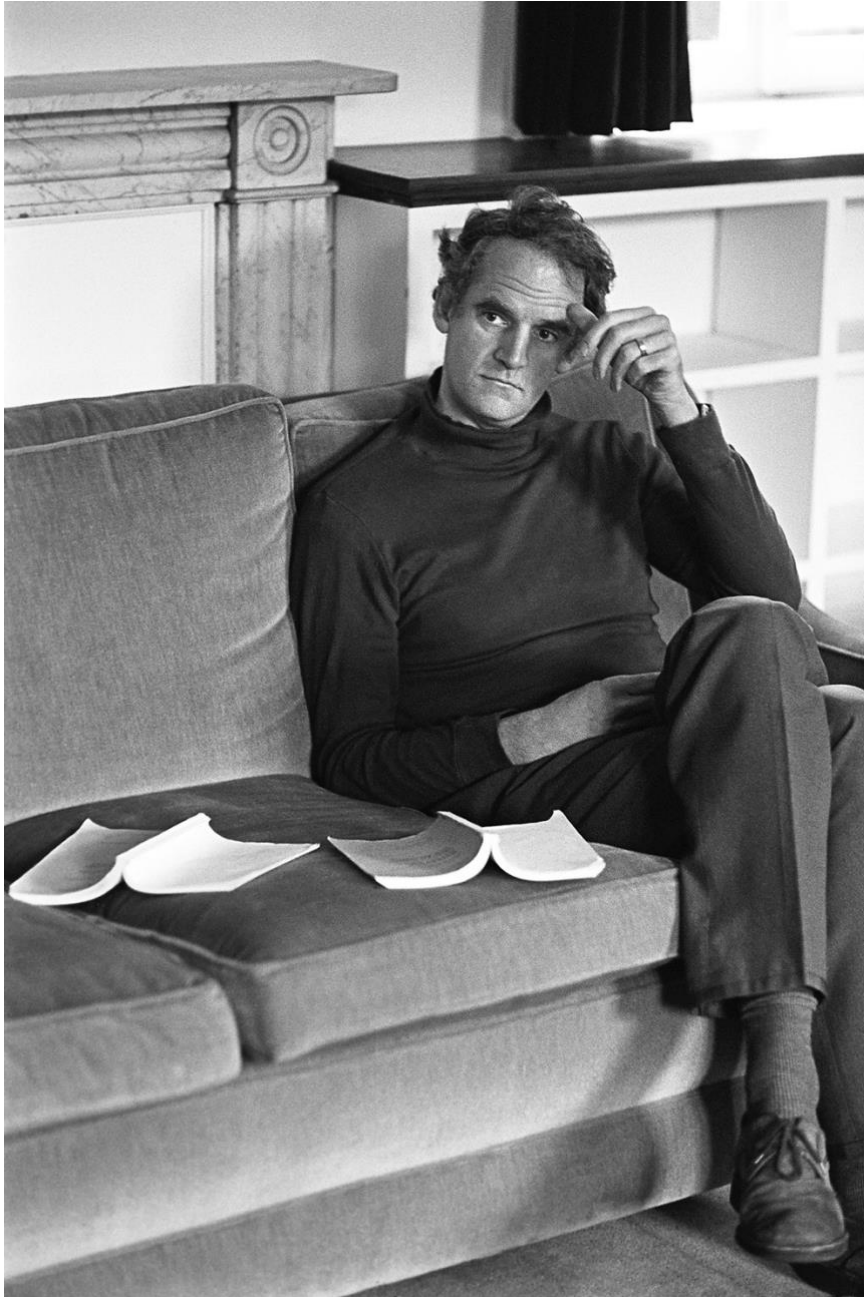


Fig. 1. Charles Margrave Taylor (b. 1931), Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at the University of Oxford, in his rooms at All Souls College, Oxford, during a tutorial with a student in May 1978. Photograph taken by Geoff A. Howard for the BBC Television series “Men of Ideas” and used with the permission of Geoff A. Howard.

Part One.

Charles Taylor and the Reform Master Narrative

## Chapter One.

### Introduction: “A Living Book”

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves...”

—Matthew 10:16.

“Admitted that whatever one does, one always plays somebody’s game, the important thing is to seek in every way to play one’s own game, i.e. to win completely.”

—Gramsci ~ *The Modern Prince*.<sup>1</sup>

When he spoke at the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518, Martin Luther (1483–1546) confessed: “The theologian of glory says bad is good and good is bad. The theologian of the cross calls them by their proper name.”<sup>2</sup> In developing an historiographical and theological analysis of Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*, this dissertation has not yielded a complementary *theologia gloriae* to Taylor’s narrative, but a jarring *theologia crucis*. By tracing out the historical development together with the religious and political implications of Taylor’s thought, it articulates an interpretation of his “story” that is discordant with the sympathetic response his work typically receives within theological circles.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, it foregrounds the foundational aspect of Taylor’s career that is predominantly overlooked in readings of his *magnum opus*: his socialist activism. Isaiah Berlin, Jason Blakely, Marc Caldwell, Madeline Davis, Mallory Dunlop, Ian Fraser, Koenraad Geldof, John Grant, Stuart Hall and others have commented on the importance of Marxist philosophy for Taylor.<sup>4</sup> And

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<sup>1</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, trans. Louis Marks (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1957), 152.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, “Heidelberg Disputation,” in *Luther: Early Theological Works*, 274–307, ed. and trans. James Atkinson (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1962), 291.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), ix.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “Introduction” in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question*, 1–4, eds. Charles Taylor, James Tully, and Daniel M. Weinstock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2; Jason Blakely, “Radicalizing and De-Radicalizing Charles Taylor,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 29, no. 5 (2021): 689–704, 693; Jason Blakely, *Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and the Demise of Naturalism: Reunifying Political Theory and Social Science* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 39; Marc Caldwell, “Charles Taylor and the pre-History of British

yet, as Dunlop and Grant noted in 2021, “Taylor’s wide-ranging work on topics such as Hegel, modernity, liberty, multiculturalism, and secularism is now regularly discussed as if Marx and socialism never figured at all.”<sup>5</sup> In 2008 Caldwell suggested that some scholars “curiously air-brush Marx out of the picture” of Taylor’s thought.<sup>6</sup> Rather than filter out that context, this dissertation makes it a focus by reading *A Secular Age* in light of Taylor’s political activism and writings, to show how his “story” is intended to function as a Gramscian-Sorelian social myth that utilizes phenomenology to cultivate solidarity and subvert capitalist hegemony in continuity with his longstanding socialist humanist commitment. It argues on the basis of research into Taylor’s formative involvement with the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, the British New Left, and the New Democratic Party that he wrote his Master Narrative in continuity with those years of activism aiming to subtly guide his readers’ political sensibilities leftward. It therefore interprets *A Secular Age* as a philosophically sophisticated, rhetorically astute, and politically instrumental characterization of Western history by one of the world’s greatest living socialist philosophers. It concludes that it is entirely accurate to call *A Secular Age* a monumental work of cultural Marxism.<sup>7</sup>

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Cultural Studies,” *Critical Arts*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2009): 342–373, 363; Marc Caldwell, “Between Empiricism and Intellectualism: Charles Taylor’s Answer to the ‘Media Wars’,” PhD Thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2008; Madeleine Davis, “Reappraising British Socialist Humanism,” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2013): 57–81, 76; Madeline Davis, “The Marxism of the British New Left,” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2006): 335–358, 335; Ian Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self: Transcending Charles Taylor* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007); Koenraad Geldof, “The Unbearable Literariness of Literature: Spectral Marxism and Metaphysical Realism in Charles Taylor’s ‘Sources of the Self,’” *New Literary History*, vol. 30, no. 2 (1999): 325–349, 344; John Grant and Mallory Dunlop, “Seeing like a Socialist: On Socialist Worldviews from Polanyi to Taylor to Now,” *New Political Science*, vol. 43, no. 4 (2021): 403–420, 406; Stuart Hall, “The ‘First’ New Left” in *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left Thirty Years On*, 11–38, ed. The Oxford University Socialist Discussion Group (London: Verso, 1989), 19; Adam Heinz, “Understanding Taylor: Charles Taylor and the shaping of a philosophical therapy for the crisis of modernity,” MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Grant and Dunlop, “Seeing like a Socialist,” 406.

<sup>6</sup> Caldwell, “Between Empiricism and Intellectualism,” 122.

<sup>7</sup> Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 56.

For despite the towering influence of Taylor's book which sold 60,000 copies in its first year alone, its meaning has not been easily apprehended.<sup>8</sup> In a review that followed shortly after the publication of *A Secular Age*, one ecclesiastical historian perceived that Taylor had written "a book which the theological establishment will doubtless fall upon as an obese child might reach for a packet of crisps. Not that they will understand much of it: for this is a universal explanation of things, written from a philosophical perspective, and which, despite the homely illustrations to which philosophical writers are sometimes given, is densely composed and at times difficult to follow."<sup>9</sup> This assessment by Edward Norman displayed uncommon acuity in reviewing Taylor's work and avoided the error of underestimation—a tempting option given how exasperating professional historians have found reading *A Secular Age*:

Those of us historians of Christianity who compare notes have commiserated with each other through two or three seasons, as we grappled with it.... Not all professional historians are charmed by linear, diachronic, narrative history, yet most of them do resort to some version of storytelling. Linearity is anything but what Taylor manifests. Instead of a narrative line, he takes up topics, drops them, and comes back to them, treating them as it were in ever-enlarging spirals...he exercises philosopher's rights.<sup>10</sup>

*A Secular Age*'s widely lamented lack of narrative and conceptual clarity was a design feature not a bug; John Milbank recognised that Taylor's argument had been "badly grasped" by reviewers as the full substance of his "Reform Master Narrative" had been "disguise[d]" in the book's "almost slangy tone", which might "deceive the half attentive reader," by hiding its "radical" thesis.<sup>11</sup> Milbank shares Taylor's socialist political

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<sup>8</sup> Paolo Costa, "In Search of a New Grand Narrative: Charles Taylor's Secularity," in *The Post-Secular City: The New Secularization Debate* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 31.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Norman, "The Withdrawal of God," *Spectator*, vol. 305, no. 9348 (2007): 52.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Marty, "Review of *A Secular Age*," *Church History*, vol. 77, no. 3 (2008): 773–775.

<sup>11</sup> John Milbank, "A Closer Walk on the Wild Side: Some Comments on Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*," *Studies in Christian Ethics*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2009): 89–104, 89. For a selection of reviews which also criticise Taylor's style in addition to those by Norman and Marty, see Anonymous, "A Land Where God Is Absent; Human Society," *The Economist*, 8 September 2007; Peter Berkowitz, "The Persistence of Belief: Review of *A Secular Age*," *Claremont Review of Books*, Spring (2008): 20–21; Craig Calhoun, "Book Review: *A Secular Age*," *European Journal of Sociology*, vol. 49, no. 3 (2008): 455–461; Paul Crittenden, "A Secular Age,"

sympathies (an important element in Taylor’s close alignment of his “story” with Radical Orthodoxy), and he could perceive that behind Taylor’s disarmingly casual prose, there “lurks in the shadows a larger thesis about religion as such”.<sup>12</sup> Taylor’s conceptually vague narrative about “enchantment,” “the transcendent,” “the transformation perspective,” and our aspiration to “fullness” worked to gently induce the reader into that liberal pluralist religious outlook—rhetorically drawing on their moral intuitions and absorbing them into his story—rather than by presenting a methodologically regulated historical or systematic theological argument. It was also profoundly subversive of traditional ecclesiastical history, which studies the history of the Church as the bride of Christ called out from the World and redeemed by grace to glorify the one true and living God. To Christian eyes, modern Western secularization is an unfolding tragedy of apostasy, a dramatic and vast turning away from God in Christ by individuals and nations marked by an attendant sense of societal decay. In Taylor’s narrative of secularization this is an aspect of a universal “divine pedagogy,” but an ecclesiastical-historical *theologia crucis* by contrast must call modern Western unbelief what it is: the sinful forsaking of God’s grace revealed in the Lord Jesus. In *The Language Animal* (2016), Taylor contended for the hermeneutical utility of “stories” like his own: “I want to defend the idea that stories give us an understanding of life, people, and what happens to them which is peculiar (i.e., distinct from what other forms, like works of science and philosophy, can give us), and also unsubstitutable (i.e., what they show us can’t be translated without remainder into other media).”<sup>13</sup> On Taylor’s definition, the

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Reflections on Charles Taylor’s Recent Book,” *Sophia*, no. 48 (2009): 469–478; Christopher Insole, “Informed Tolerance: Review of *A Secular Age*,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 February 2008; John Kinsey, “A Secular Age – By Charles Taylor,” *Philosophical Investigations*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2010): 75–81; Stuart Jeffries, “Is That All There Is?” *The Guardian*, 7 December 2007; Arto Laitinen, “Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2010): 353–355, 355; Charles Larmore, “How Much Can We Stand?” *The New Republic*, 9 April 2008; Vaughan Roberts, “Review of *A Secular Age*,” *Implicit Religion*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2009): 121–123; Philip Rossi, “Book Review: *A Secular Age*,” *Theological Studies*, vol. 69, no. 4 (2008): 953–954; Edward Skidelsky, “How the Heavens Fell Silent,” *Daily Telegraph*, 8 December 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Milbank, “A Closer Walk on the Wild Side,” 95.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Taylor, *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 291.

purpose of a “story” is to convey insight through an irreducible affective sense. Given this empirically elusive aim it is understandable that “[h]istoriographic discussions of Taylor’s book have been somewhat thin on the ground.”<sup>14</sup> This dissertation seeks to critically elucidate *A Secular Age*’s “peculiar” and “unsubstitutable” quality, i.e., to render a clear interpretation of the nature of Taylor’s intended affect and his strategies in generating it, while also exploring the explanatory power and hermeneutical dimensions of a theologically forthright ecclesiastical history.

The critical historiographical task is complex not only because of Taylor’s philosophically elusive approach which aims at irreducibility but also due to the scale of his narrative, which necessitates the careful selection of lines of argument and analysis. In this connection Michael Bentley’s *Companion to Historiography* (1997) models the important orientating questions:

In order to penetrate the sheer mass of this material [the scholarship of Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886)], we need to ask questions about at least four of its aspects: its epistemology or view of historical knowledge; its idea of historical understanding; its doctrines about explanation; and its implications about method.<sup>15</sup>

These themes are explored in detail in the subsequent chapters, but some provisional comments are appropriate in this introduction to give an initial frame to the argument. Taylor’s approach to historical sources indicates (1) his conception of historical knowledge, and his method in *A Secular Age* is largely to stitch together insights from thoughtfully chosen items of secondary literature for his narrative. A survey of his footnotes quickly shows that it is not so much primary evidence from past events as it is the contemporary understanding of them in more recent studies that he works to colligate as evidence. This

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<sup>14</sup> Ian Hunter, “Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* and Secularization in Early Modern Germany,” *Modern Intellectual History*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2011): 621–646, 621fn1.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Bentley, “Introduction: Approaches to Modernity: Western Historiography since the Enlightenment,” in *Companion to Historiography*, 395–506, ed. Michael Bentley (London: Routledge, 1997), 421.

method coheres with his pragmatic-instrumentalist approach to historical knowledge, focused on the contemporary political effect of certain historical senses. Taylor's idea of (2) historical understanding prizes empathy but goes further to also include an innovative phenomenological approach to the experience of his historical subjects, which transcends a clear empirical-evidential basis. This gave him great freedom in describing ostensible causes and effects that elude professional historians. This relates to (3) Taylor's understanding of historical explanation: his explanatory objective was phenomenological, to narrate the rise of what he called, "Secularity 3"—the secularization of the modern Westerner's intuitive grasp of the world and their pre-reflective experience of life (the important problem of homogenization and universalization latent in this approach will be addressed later). His method was to trace developments in the history of Western thought and assess how they converged to construct a reflexive epistemological paradigm of naturalism and ethic of secular humanism. One challenge for this approach was explaining how the intellectual contributions of a few cultural élites came to determinatively shape the lived experience of others. In *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1989), Taylor outlined his theory of historical causation regarding this aspect of intellectual history; he argued that ideas are transmitted at the popular level through embodied practices that then condition and create a collective experience and interpretation of the world.<sup>16</sup> This phenomenological emphasis on social praxis leads to (4) the implications for method: Taylor's explanatory account largely evades direct falsification because it traces modifications in the "background" of Western subjectivity. He is also careful to adjectivally couch his historical propositions so that they function as intangible impressions. By contrast, "[h]istorical hermeneutics is 'normal science,' rational procedure undertaken and policed (yes) by a

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<sup>16</sup> Charles Taylor, "A Digression on Historical Explanation," in *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); see also, Craig Calhoun, "Morality, Identity, and Historical Explanation: Charles Taylor on the Sources of the Self," *Sociological Theory*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1991): 232–263.

‘disciplinary community.’”<sup>17</sup> Considering this standard, Taylor’s approach appears quite evasive—although it must be granted that he does not present *A Secular Age* as a work of history. Given its approach and intention, his “story” is more accurately understood as modern endeavour of mythopoiesis. For Taylor’s historical writing aims at generating a politically instrumental sense of the West’s past and thereby implanting an outlook for its future.

Writing a grand narrative requires a powerful organizing vision. To put it tersely, Taylor’s proposal in his “Reform Master Narrative” was that Western culture, from the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) through the Reformation and Counter Reformation to the French Revolution (1789) and the Bolshevik Revolution (1917), was marked by a “drive to Reform” and a “rage for order”. According to Taylor, this impulse to “Reform” was an extension of the post-Axial emancipatory drive to critique that ultimately fostered secular humanism in the West. The overarching dialectical-teleological structure of his Reform Master Narrative is neatly illustrated by his assessment of Mendicant preachers:

If we see this attempt by an élite to make over the base as a kind of distant preparation for a world in which something like the Bolshevik party can emerge, then we can see the friars as a form of late-medieval agit-prop. (There are of course many intermediate stages, including later orders, like the Jesuits, then the Jacobins, etc.)<sup>18</sup>

But why would “we see this [as an] attempt by an élite to make over the base [and] as a kind of distant preparation for a world in which something like the Bolshevik party can emerge”? Why would Christian missionary endeavour be subjected to this distorting characterization as an élite remaking of the base? Why would it occur to Taylor to “see the friars as a form of late-medieval agit-prop”? Taylor’s conflation of Dominican preaching with Communist

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<sup>17</sup> John H. Zammito, “Post-Positivist Realism: Regrounding Representation,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory*, 401–423, eds. Nancy Partner and Sarah Foot (London: SAGE, 2012), 410.

<sup>18</sup> *ASA*, 65.

propaganda is indicative of the definitive subterranean and hermeneutically decisive ideological influence on his scholarship.

Based on an examination of his New Left writings on “Socialist Humanism,” published after the revelations of Stalinist tyranny in 1956, this dissertation advances its thesis that the unstated Ur-problem of *A Secular Age*, and Taylor’s “philosophical anthropology” more generally, concerns the historical emergence of Soviet oppression as a manifestation of philosophical pathologies inherent in historical materialism: reductionism and unanimism. Amidst the revelations of 1956, Taylor maintained and developed his non-reductive affirmation of Marxist-Rousseauian alienation theory, initially mediated to him by the Catholic Personalism circulating in 1940s Québec, which underlay his commitment to Socialism and inspired his later efforts to generate an emancipatory Socialist *Sittlichkeit* that does not preclude human freedom. Taylor’s scholarship therefore appears as an extended application of the Gramscian ideas he encountered while studying for his second BA and DPhil at the University of Oxford from 1952 to 1961. In 1957, a Balliol College alumnus, Communist Party Historians Group member, and later BBC producer, Louis Marks, translated a collection of writings by the former secretary of the Italian Communist Party, Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), which provided intellectual intravenous therapy for the traumatised post-1956 British Left.<sup>19</sup> This collection was a demonstrably crucial source for Taylor as a socialist politician and academic. Marks’s edition of *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (1957), included Gramsci’s philosophical-anthropological essay, “What is Man?” which opened with the declaration: “This is the primary and main question in philosophy.”<sup>20</sup> “Philosophy cannot be reduced to naturalistic anthropology”, Gramsci argued.<sup>21</sup> Taylor has notably defined himself as a “monomaniac” fixated on questions of

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<sup>19</sup> David Forgacs, “Gramsci and Marxism in Britain,” *New Left Review*, no. 176 (1989): 70–88, 70–74.

<sup>20</sup> *MPOW*, 76.

<sup>21</sup> *MPOW*, 80.

“philosophical anthropology” and elaborated wide-ranging critiques of naturalism in the human sciences alongside conceptualizations of agency and the self from a socialist humanist perspective.<sup>22</sup> Gramsci’s philosophical anthropology also evoked a version of what became known as the Axial thesis:

It is true, of course, that religions which preached the equality of men as the sons of God, as well as those philosophies which affirmed man’s equality on the basis of his reasoning faculty, were the expressions of complex revolutionary movements (the transformation of the classical world, the transformation of the mediævel world), and that these forged the strongest links in the chain of historical development.<sup>23</sup>

In this way, Gramsci identified a unifying thread for a universal history teleologically orientated towards revolutionary socialism. It was clearly appropriated by Taylor. For when Taylor defined the contribution of *A Secular Age* in contradistinction from other narratives of Western secularization, he explained that his work considered,

another important piece, which deals with the thrust to complete the Axial revolution; I mean Reform...It is this process, occurring in Latin Christendom, that I have been focusing on, through the various social and cultural changes which have been generated on the way. Let’s refer to this as the Reform Master Narrative (RMN).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1, 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>24</sup> ASA, 774. In *A Secular Age*, Taylor defined the Axial thesis: “I have been speaking of “early religion” to contrast with what many people have called “post-Axial” religions. The reference is to what Karl Jaspers called the “Axial Age”, the extraordinary period in the last millennium B.C.E., when various “higher” forms of religion appeared seemingly independently in different civilizations, marked by such founding figures as Confucius, Gautama, Socrates, the Hebrew prophets. The surprising feature of the Axial religions, compared with what went before, what would in other words have made them hard to predict beforehand, is that they initiate a break in all three dimensions of embeddedness: social order, cosmos, human good.” ASA, 151. Taylor clarified his use of this language in a footnote: “In using these terms, “Axial” and “post-Axial”, I am groping for an expression to distinguish two quite different forms of religious life, one of which goes back much longer than the other. But I am not necessarily accepting much of what Jaspers associated with this term. For instance, I have no final view on whether we can identify a particular “Axial Age” (*Achsenzeit*) when these important changes occurred in civilizations far removed from each other more or less simultaneously.... For my purposes in this book, the contrast between pre- and post-Axial is defined by the features I enumerate in the text.” ASA, 792fn9. To give one example of Taylor’s contrast between pre- and post-Axial forms of religion: “And what has perhaps not sufficiently been remarked is the way in which this dimension of religion [“moments of fusion, which wrench us out of the everyday, and put us in contact with something beyond ourselves”], which goes back to its earliest forms, well before the Axial age, is still alive and well today, in spite of all attempts by Reforming élites over many centuries to render our religious and/or moral lives more personal and inward, to disenchant the universe and *downplay the collective*.” ASA, 516–517. Emphasis added.

Localised to the West, Taylor explored the outworking of this ostensibly post-Axial sentiment as “the mother of Revolutions” in continuity with Gramsci’s philosophical anthropology and theory of history.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, in his essay, “Marxism and Modern Culture,” Gramsci unmistakably prefigured the structure of Taylor’s narrative:

Marxism crowns the whole movement for intellectual and moral reform dialecticised in the contrast between popular and higher culture. It corresponds to the nexus of Protestant Reformation plus French Revolution.<sup>26</sup>

The parallels also extend through the mythopoeitic form of *A Secular Age*. Gramsci’s treatise, “The Modern Prince: Essays on the Science of Politics in the Modern Age,” theorized how revolutionary socialists could establish political counterhegemony within the modern liberal-capitalist order, outlining the cultural work of “the modern Prince, the myth-prince”.<sup>27</sup> Ken Hirschkop has interpreted Gramsci as adopting a twofold approach to establishing counterhegemony that required both a political institution and a text: “The modern Prince—the thing—will be the Communist Party; ‘The Modern Prince’—the text—will establish the party as myth”.<sup>28</sup> Gramsci began his treatise by delineating the nature of this “myth”:

The fundamental characteristic of *The Prince* is that it is not a systematic treatment, but a living book, in which political ideology and political science are fused in the dramatic form of a “myth”.<sup>29</sup>

The preface to Taylor’s *magnum opus* explained:

I am telling a story...I ask the reader who picks up this book not to think of it as a continuous story-and-argument...I hope the general thrust of my thesis will emerge from this sketchy treatment, and will

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<sup>25</sup> *ASA*, 61.

<sup>26</sup> *MPOW*, 87.

<sup>27</sup> *MPOW*, 137.

<sup>28</sup> Ken Hirschkop, *Linguistic Turns, 1890–1950: Writing on Language as Social Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 242

<sup>29</sup> *MPOW*, 135.

suggest to others further ways of developing, applying, modifying and transposing the argument.<sup>30</sup>

This dissertation argues that *A Secular Age* is such a “living book,” a “story” written by a socialist politician and political theorist that through an energetic reception has diffused its paradigm-shifting concepts across the contemporary intellectual landscape. For as Gramsci also noted, “Machevelli never says that he is thinking of changing reality, or that he has set himself to change, reality, but only that he is showing concretely how the historical forces ought to have worked in order to be effective.”<sup>31</sup> And “[a]n important part of the modern Prince will have to be devoted to the question of intellectual and moral reform, that is, to the question of religion or world outlook.”<sup>32</sup> Hence this dissertation argues that *A Secular Age* is aptly understood in the Gramscian terms of “the Sorellian ‘myth’, that is, of a political ideology which is not presented as a cold utopia or as a rational doctrine, but as creation of concrete fantasy which works on a dispersed and pulverised people in order to arouse and organise their collective will.”<sup>33</sup>

Subjecting *A Secular Age* to a global expositional-analytical study is not possible in a dissertation given the scope of Taylor’s book and due to its presentation of something “unsubstitutable” through “a set of interlocking essays”. The approach of this study is weighted towards Taylor’s intellectual biography so that *A Secular Age* can be understood as a literary expression that emerges out of his philosophical and political reflection. It also concentrates its analysis on Taylor’s interpretation of early modern Protestantism in *A Secular Age*, with reference to how his interpretation germinated in his earlier writings, and specifically focused on three Christians who have significant and illustrative roles in his story: John Calvin (1509–1564), Richard Baxter (1615–1691), and Jonathan Edwards

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<sup>30</sup> *ASA*, ix.

<sup>31</sup> *MPOW*, 164.

<sup>32</sup> *MPOW*, 139.

<sup>33</sup> *MPOW*, 135.

(1703–1758). The analysis is drawn more finely still by dissecting specific aspects of Taylor's interpretation of these figures to illustrate the wider historiographical point regarding the nature of his scholarship. Nevertheless, the engagement with these figures entails an autonomous work of theological retrieval which is frequently made explicit, and some constructive theoretical sketches are drawn along the way.

## Chapter Two.

### Charles Taylor, 1931–1961: “A Sort of Catholic Marxist”

“Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.”

—Genesis 2:8.

“But the social order is a sacred right that serves as a foundation for all others. This right, however, does not come from nature. It is therefore based on conventions. The question is to know what these conventions are.”

—Rousseau ~ *The Social Contract*.<sup>34</sup>

In 2008, the renowned Canadian philosopher and political theorist, Charles Taylor (b. 1931), won the Kyoto Prize for lifetime achievement in Arts and Philosophy recognizing his “Construction of a Social Philosophy to Pursue the Coexistence of Diverse Cultures”.<sup>35</sup> One of many prizes awarded during his distinguished career: it followed the publication of his monumental portrayal of Western religious culture, *A Secular Age* (2007).<sup>36</sup> For his commemorative lecture at the award ceremony, the former Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at All Souls College, Oxford, gave a self-defining autobiographical address: “What Drove Me to Philosophy?”<sup>37</sup> Taylor recorded that the themes of his life’s work originated in a childhood longing for a “place full of marvels”, a utopian and “paradoxical” place, situated “outside of the garden where I lived and played”.<sup>38</sup> Then, “in adolescence I began to have a sense of this higher place as linked with God,” he explained, “and with a

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<sup>34</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract; And, the First and Second Discourses*, ed. Susan Dunn (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2002), 156.

<sup>35</sup> “Taylor Wins Kyoto Prize for Arts, Philosophy; First Time Canadians Awarded ‘Japanese Nobel’,” *Montreal Gazette*, 11 November 2008, 9.

<sup>36</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). The 874-page tome was the expansion of his Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh, “Living in a Secular Age” (1998–1999).

<sup>37</sup> Charles Taylor, “What Drove Me to Philosophy?” in *Inamori Foundation: Kyoto Prize & Inamori Grants* (Kyoto: Inamori Foundation, 2008), 176–204.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

possible sense of transformation of human beings.”<sup>39</sup> Through a desire to articulate this intuition, he was being “nudged towards philosophy, which is all about articulating what has never been properly said.”<sup>40</sup> Aspiring to grasp and articulate this sense of an elusive “higher place” more adequately, Taylor described how he had studied History at McGill University (1949–1952). Towards the end of this degree, “I became involved in politics”, he recalled—for he was also concerned with “the ways that politics could transform human life.”<sup>41</sup> The integral question for Taylor’s interrelated moral intuition and political interest was in “philosophical anthropology: what were human beings, these beings who can speak and therefore articulate, and in this way transform themselves.”<sup>42</sup> The problem that he had encountered through his student engagement with the subjects of History and Politics, however, was that they were studied in a way that was metaphysically prohibitive and therefore intellectually and politically stifling; they typically supposed a “stripped-down, reductive view of human life.”<sup>43</sup> So Taylor told his audience at the commemorative lecture:

A great deal of my work has been an attempt to combat this kind of reductive, over-simple, *one-dimensional* understanding. Another impetus was a more immediate practical one: how to articulate the political issues of our time, so that we can actually make headway. And behind both of these was the original search, for that paradoxical place beyond space, for a possible higher mode of being.<sup>44</sup>

Driven by this utopian longing—professedly originating in a childhood sense of a higher place beyond his “garden”—Taylor’s work has battled against the twentieth-century hegemony of a reductive, “one-dimensional understanding” of human life and society—spurred by the immediate political challenges to “headway.” Speaking to a broad audience, Taylor was vague regarding the specifics of his political hope to overcome the one-

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.

dimensionality of Western social life: what exactly does he consider the “headway” that “we” need to make? His interpretation of early modern Protestantism in *A Secular Age* is only intelligible against that political-philosophical backdrop.

The distinguishing trait of Taylor’s intellectual and political agenda, which has become more prominent over time, has been his progressive Roman Catholic faith. As James L. Heft noted in 1999, “his Catholicism has been a central, if mostly implicit, element in his philosophical writings.”<sup>45</sup> That same year, Koenraad Geldof’s examination of *Sources of the Self* in the journal *New Literary History* had suggested, “Taylor has a special something going on with Western Marxism.”<sup>46</sup> Specifically, Geldof argued that “Western Marxism plays the role of an implicit yet *constitutive* intertext.”<sup>47</sup> This reading was not as outlandish as it might seem considering that Taylor’s progressive faith was perceived even in his student days by the cultural theorist, Stuart Hall (1932–2014), who co-founded the *New Left Review* with Taylor in 1960, and described him as “that even more perplexing phenomenon, a sort of Catholic Marxist.”<sup>48</sup> If formerly “mostly implicit,” Taylor’s modernist Catholicism is now a well-known feature of his thought; his background in Western Marxism, signalled more discreetly in his later works, has received less attention but is increasingly noted.<sup>49</sup> When Pope Francis (b. 1936) conferred the “Ratzinger Prize” on Taylor in 2019—the same year as the recipient’s Walter-Benjamin-Lectures at the Humboldt University of Berlin—he celebrated that Taylor’s work on Western secularization, “helps us to read in a *non-reductive* way the reasons for the changes that have taken place in religious practice. He invites us to *intuit* and seek new ways to live and express the *transcendent dimensions* of the human soul,

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<sup>45</sup> James L. Heft, “Introduction,” in *A Catholic Modernity?: Charles Taylor’s Marianist Award Lecture*, 3–12, ed. James L. Heft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>46</sup> Geldof, “The Unbearable Literariness of Literature,” 344.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 327. Emphasis original.

<sup>48</sup> Stuart Hall, “The ‘First’ New Left,” in *Out of Apathy*, 19.

<sup>49</sup> Jason Blakely, “Radicalizing and De-Radicalizing Charles Taylor,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 29, no. 5 (2021): 689–704; Grant and Dunlop, “Seeing like a Socialist,” 403–420.

those spiritual dimensions in which the Spirit continues to work imperceptibly.”<sup>50</sup> These were appreciative gestures towards Taylor’s philosophical efforts in moral ontology and hermeneutics, and his intuitionist approach to latent transcendence in the modern West; ideas inchoate in the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), which, akin to Taylor, drew inspiration from the *Nouvelle Théologie*.<sup>51</sup> Francis also cited the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI (1897–1978), *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), in recognizing Taylor’s Catholic witness as an academic: “Evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and *through its influence transforming humanity from within* and making it new.”<sup>52</sup> The Pope gave a fresh gloss to his predecessor’s Exhortation, “[t]his is true for all cultures: access to redemption for humanity in all of its *dimensions* should be sought with creativity and imagination”.<sup>53</sup> The chime of Taylor’s reference to Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), and his seminal New Left critique of modern Western culture, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (1964), resonates for those with ears to hear.<sup>54</sup>

This chapter and chapter three develop an intellectual-biographical analytic narrative history of Charles Taylor as a landmark twentieth and twenty-first-century thinker to contextualize this dissertation’s critical analysis of his interpretation of early modern Protestantism in *A Secular Age*. The primary challenge to writing analytically on a topic in Taylor’s *magnum opus* is the interconnectedness of his thought, which is obscured by his winding and often ambiguous writing style—yet each ambiguously expressed idea can gain

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<sup>50</sup> Pope Francis, “Conferral of the 2019 ‘Ratzinger Prize,’” *Vatican*, 9 November 2019, accessed 6 November 2020, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20191109\\_premio-ratzinger.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/november/documents/papa-francesco_20191109_premio-ratzinger.html). Emphasis added.

<sup>51</sup> Gerd-Rainer Horn, *Western European Liberation Theology: The First Wave (1924–1959)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of Vatican II: Western European Progressive Catholicism in the Long Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>52</sup> Francis, “‘Ratzinger Prize.’” Emphasis added.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

<sup>54</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2002).

a clearer sense of meaning in relation to the larger whole of his *oeuvre*.<sup>55</sup> As one Protestant exegete noted in *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae* (1580), “the individual parts of a whole everywhere draw their comprehensibility from their relationship to that whole and to the other parts.”<sup>56</sup> Drawing the interpretative key out from Taylor’s intellectual biography is vital when reading a book that is, “in a sense, concerned with nothing less than everything that has happened in recorded history in western civilization.”<sup>57</sup> Such a book requires an overarching theoretical paradigm to “do the work” hermeneutically, so to speak. Upon winning the Templeton Prize in 2007, Taylor discussed his scholarship in an interview: “Are you a fox or a hedgehog?” He was asked. The interviewer’s question referred to an essay by one of Taylor’s doctoral supervisors, Sir Isaiah Berlin (1909–1997), who argued that there were two kinds of intellectuals: hedgehogs, “who relate everything to a single central vision,” and foxes, who pursue diverse and unrelated intellectual ends.<sup>58</sup> Taylor’s response was illuminating:

Charles Taylor: (laughing) Oh very definitely a hedgehog.

John Templeton Foundation: You’re a hedgehog? He [Berlin] said you were a hedgehog, but I’m surprised to hear you say that.

Charles Taylor: Everything connects.

John Templeton Foundation: Everything connects, but I see in your range of interests and your ability to go across multiple disciplines, a fox-like demeanor. Are you not a hedgehog disguised as a fox?

Charles Taylor: Yes, ok, as a fox. (laughs). But don’t blow my cover!<sup>59</sup>

In *A Secular Age*, “everything connects” to “a single central vision”. Berlin said this was true of Taylor’s thought, and Berlin also indicated that Marxist ideology influenced his

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<sup>55</sup> ASA, ix.

<sup>56</sup> Matthais Flacius Illyricus, *Clavis Scripturae Sacrae*, cited in Wilhelm Dilthey, “The Rise of Hermeneutics (1900),” in *Wilhelm Dilthey: Selected Works, Volume IV: Hermeneutics and the Study of History*, 235–258, ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 244.

<sup>57</sup> J. A. Franklin, *Charles Taylor and Anglican Theology: Aesthetic Ecclesiology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 31.

<sup>58</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy’s View of History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1953).

<sup>59</sup> Charles Taylor, “What Role Does Spiritual Thinking Have in the Twenty-First Century,” *John Templeton Foundation*, accessed 3 October 2023, <https://www.templeton.org/charles-taylor-spiritual-thinking>.

former student when he wrote the introduction to a 1994 *Festschrift* for Taylor.<sup>60</sup> The ideas of analytic interest for this dissertation—the epistemic legitimacy and theological coherence of Taylor’s phenomenology of enchantment/disenchantment, his argument that John Calvin disenchanting the Lord’s Supper, his critique that Richard Baxter articulated an oppressive political theology, and his proposal that Jonathan Edwards charts an “itinerary” to “fullness” through his experience of redemption in the Lord Jesus Christ—are thrown into sharp relief through sight of this “single central vision”: namely, Taylor’s Socialist Humanist hope for life in the “Dialogue Society”.<sup>61</sup> That is the utopian “higher place” that Taylor intuitively senses for pursuit through scholarship that develops a non-reductive philosophical anthropology, concerned with the political transformation of human life. In Taylor’s career, these are two sides of the same coin: his scholarship is a form of activism.<sup>62</sup> Hence the Kyoto Prize committee recognized his efforts towards the “Construction of a Social Philosophy to Pursue the Coexistence of Diverse Cultures”: *A Secular Age* is principally a constructive endeavour in Social Theory and Political Philosophy that through the projection of a “story”—Taylor’s “Reform Master Narrative”—seeks to define the nature of Western religious culture and embed a course for its development. Jonathan Sheehan has even contended that in *A Secular Age*, ““What was religion?” is not the question on the table. Rather, it is ‘What will religion become?’”<sup>63</sup>

Considering this dimension of Taylor’s work, the author should be transparent from the outset and make a “full disclosure” by elaborating his own “central vision.”<sup>64</sup> It is not of

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<sup>60</sup> Berlin, “Introduction” in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, 2.

<sup>61</sup> The key texts that delineate this vision are Charles Taylor, “From Marxism to the Dialogue Society,” in *From Culture to Revolution; The Slant Symposium, 1967*, 148–181, eds. Terry Eagleton and Brian Wicker (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968); Charles Taylor, “Marxism and Socialist Humanism,” in *Out of Apathy*, 59–78; and Charles Taylor, *The Pattern of Politics* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970).

<sup>62</sup> See Taylor, “Marxism and Socialist Humanism,” 73.

<sup>63</sup> Jonathan Sheehan, “When Was Disenchantment?” in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, 217–242, eds. Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig J. Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 232.

<sup>64</sup> Charles Taylor, “Challenging Issues about the Secular Age,” *Modern Theology*, vol. 26, no. 3 (2010): 404–416, 407.

progress towards a utopian socialist society underpinned by pluriform engagement with the transcendent. It is an understanding of history as salvation history, and I write as a Christian ecclesiastical historian.<sup>65</sup> The most ambitious aim of this dissertation therefore is to lay the groundwork for what J.C.D. Clark alluded to in his historiographical review article, “Secularization and Modernization: The Failure of a ‘Grand Narrative’” (2012): “It may be that the still-ghettoized subject of ‘ecclesiastical history’ has failed to address the growing problems of secularization theory and failed to deliver on its potential to integrate both theism and atheism in a larger vision, perhaps in an alternative master narrative.”<sup>66</sup> While written in profound sympathy with Clark’s suggestion, this dissertation cannot claim to accomplish this: it critically explicates Taylor’s interpretation of early modern Protestantism against the backdrop of his political philosophy, and *via* that study articulates elements of an ecclesiastical-historical master narrative—one that rejects pluralist philosophies of religion, draws a categorical distinction between the Church and the world, is grounded in a creational ontology and realist epistemology, and understands Christian experience as redemption not “enchantment”. To briefly situate and profile themes of this outlook with reference to other paradigms of modern thought more broadly: one of Taylor’s foremost influences, G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831), argued that embodied subjectivity participated in History as subjective spirit and objective spirit manifested the same Absolute Spirit and progressed towards that rational self-awareness.<sup>67</sup> Then, in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*—which were also a formative influence on Taylor—Karl Marx (1818–1883) naturalized Hegel’s philosophy in his theory of Communism, reflected in the following definition:

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<sup>65</sup> I adhere to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647).

<sup>66</sup> J.C.D. Clark, “Secularization and Modernization: The Failure of a ‘Grand Narrative,’” *The Historical Journal*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2012): 161–194, 192.

<sup>67</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

*Communism as the positive transcendence of private property, as human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as a complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e., human) being—a return become conscious, and accomplished within the entire wealth of the previous development. This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man—the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution.*<sup>68</sup>

For both Marx and Hegel, the subject (humanity/subjective spirit) meaningfully partakes of that which is given in History. Each in their own way articulated a “single central vision” that climaxed in a consciousness that knew itself as the culmination of “the entire wealth of the previous development.” These teleological conceptions of history—reflected and attenuated in Taylor’s philosophy of religion and socialist theory—were modern reworkings of the Christian understanding of salvation history: including a kind of beatific vision within an immanent eschaton. Intrinsically theological ecclesiastical history was antecedent to these modern philosophies of history.<sup>69</sup> For the original redemptive-historical Master Narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and glorification (including the themes of progress, emancipation, and restoration from alienation) that had structured the Western world—through the institution of the Church—was based on the divine revelation of the Bible.<sup>70</sup> As it was revealed to the Patriarchs, foretold by the Prophets, and repeated by the Apostles: God saves those who believe in His promises. The divine promises, objectively given in history and recorded in the Scriptures, bond the infinite and the eternal Triune God with His finite and temporal subjects. The life-giving grace of the Holy Spirit grants faith in those revealed

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<sup>68</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Guildford, CN: Prometheus Books, 1988), 102–103. Emphasis original.

<sup>69</sup> Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

<sup>70</sup> This understanding, expressed in secular terms, is increasingly being recovered within popular culture, see for example Tom Holland, *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (London: Little Brown, 2019).

promises and makes the subject a transformed participant in this objective narrative of salvation history. This was the harmony between the subject and the meaning of history communicated in Christian theology. The ecclesiastical historian's task is to depict events within this narrative: that is the object of their evidence-based, though imperfect, literary mimesis. Philosophically, the revelation of divine promises and mimetic historical writing imply a correspondence theory of truth and philosophy of language—revelation calls for trust, and patience awaiting the empirical fulfilment of the promise; the revelation is subject to criteria of falsification and verification. The apical promise of redemption and the forgiveness of sins through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—who pledges to build his Church that the gates of Hell will not prevail against it—is attested to by the facts of Old Testament prophecy, the empty tomb, and the ongoing witness of his disciples. Faith in these divine promises by the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit experientially unites the believer with Christ, and his Church—its past, and its present work—in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection. Joy, freedom, love, peace, and holiness are the distinguishing marks of this new life, features of this new subjectivity. This subjectivity continues to have a presence within the modern research university. Twenty years ago, Sir Roger Scruton (1944–2020) described the pervasive influence of one thinker affiliated with the New Left and observed: “his books are on university reading lists all over Europe and America. His vision of European culture as the institutionalized form of oppressive power is taught everywhere as gospel, to students who have neither the culture nor the religion to resist it.”<sup>71</sup> My Protestant Christian writing and theological resistance to the New Left is based on my experience of redemption and the witness of the Holy Spirit to the Divinity of Christ (and therefore his absolute authority as Lord) through the Scripture. If most university students had “neither the culture nor the religion” to resist the New Left in 2003, then the prospects for a Christian

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<sup>71</sup> Roger Scruton, “Why I Became a Conservative,” *The New Criterion*, vol. 21, no. 6 (2003): 4–12, 5.

ecclesiastical historian writing in 2023 might appear very bleak indeed. However, the high-water mark of Leftist critique in the academy has been reached—matched and limited by heightened public concerns about free speech—and it is unclear what the future holds.<sup>72</sup> For in 2004, only a year after Scruton’s piece, the left-wing French theorist Bruno Latour (1947–2022) published a provocative article in *Critical Inquiry*: “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?”<sup>73</sup> He was writing as a “good military officer” evaluating his philosophical “weapons” now that critical theories had overcome Western high culture:

Would it not be rather terrible if we were still training young kids—yes, young recruits, young cadets—for wars that are no longer possible, fighting enemies long gone, conquering territories that no longer exist, leaving them ill-equipped in the face of threats we had not anticipated, for which we are so thoroughly unprepared?<sup>74</sup>

[E]ntire Ph.D. programs are still running to make sure that good American kids are learning the hard way that facts are made up, that there is no such thing as natural, unmediated, unbiased access to truth, that we are always prisoners of language, that we always speak from a particular standpoint, and so on, while dangerous extremists are using the very same argument of social construction to destroy hard-won evidence that could save our lives.<sup>75</sup>

Latour was referring to the Bush administration’s use of ideas from his field of Science Studies to relativize calls for climate action. Influenced by Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005), Rita Felski, who gave the 2021 Clark Lectures at Trinity College, Cambridge, echoed this concern in *The Limits of Critique* (2015), where she noted that “climate change skeptics [*sic*] as well as queer theorists” both rely on a hermeneutic of suspicion that is now “enmeshed in the world rather than opposed to the world and offers no special guarantee of intellectual insight, political virtue, or ideological purity...forms of skepticism [*sic*] or

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<sup>72</sup> See also, Charles Taylor, “Neutrality in the University,” in *Neutrality and Impartiality: The University and Political Commitment*, 128–148, ed. Alan Montefiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), esp. 148.

<sup>73</sup> Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2004): 225–248.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

antifoundationalism have no inherent or necessary political effects.”<sup>76</sup> In other words, as Latour had also perceived, popular and more cerebral kinds of suspicion and critique now cut in every direction, and the successful critique of conservative values does not guarantee the successful construction and installation of progressive ones. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1950–2009) observed this earlier as well, “for someone to have an unmystified view of systemic oppressions does not *intrinsically* or *necessarily* enjoin that person to any specific train of epistemological or narrative consequences.”<sup>77</sup> Latour, Sedgwick, and Felski are therefore associated with the postcritique movement in the contemporary humanities, which is born of the sense that these critical theories are exhausted (commodified, even), and seeks to develop new reading strategies that implicitly enjoin a progressive political outlook.<sup>78</sup> After training a generation of students in the emancipatory strategies of critique that can undermine the authority of any value, as Latour delineated, the challenge that remained for left-wing academics was to advance progressive principles in a compelling way: actor–network theory, reparative reading, and Taylor’s notion of “the network of agape” share this collectivist aim to theorize and instil a sense of social embeddedness to cultivate solidarity with a view to Socialist government. The radical (and to some readers too contentious) element of Taylor’s approach was his spiritual realism.<sup>79</sup> For Taylor, the processes of modernization, emancipation, and the drive to expressive individualism appeared as manifestations of the “Divine pedagogy” that he hoped might culminate in a recovery of

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<sup>76</sup> Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 1, 51; Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Dennis Savage (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1970).

<sup>77</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You’re so Paranoid You Probably Think this Essay is About You,” in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy and Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 127. Emphasis original.

<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski, eds. *Critique and Postcritique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

<sup>79</sup> ASA, 768: “In our religious lives we are responding to a transcendent reality.” Cf. Martin Jay, “Faith-Based History,” *History and Theory*, vol. 48, no. 1 (2009): 76–84, 84: “there is ample reason to worry that the post-secular age, if indeed it is upon us, has some very unpleasant and, alas, meaningless surprises in store, no matter how eagerly they are folded once again into the lessons of a divine pedagogue, whose previous teaching evaluations, alas, leave a great deal to be desired.”

solidarity that retained the newfound freedom as the Axial Revolution drew full circle. In addition to its pluralist philosophy of religion, Taylor's appropriation from the Axial Theory of World Religions (discussed in chapter four), included the insight that critique was energized by transcendent principles: justice, mercy, etc. Critical theorizations of "Whiteness" and "cisheteronormativity", however, have been heavily commodified and sublimated into so-called "woke" capitalism—rendered one-dimensional by their inability to uphold a critical value outside the "immanent frame"—i.e., "enmeshed in the world rather than opposed to the world," as Felski said.<sup>80</sup> True revolutionary and critical potency is drawn from an appeal to the transcendent, and frequently energized by an experience of transcendence.<sup>81</sup> This dissertation is written with sensitivity to this postcritical mood, noting that "[i]n the most advanced theoretical circles, it is now possible to speak...of 'the breakdown of the philosophical prohibition of religion'", and reads early modern Protestant spiritual experience non-reductively with a hermeneutic of sympathy from within the Christian Master Narrative of salvation history.<sup>82</sup> It also pays closer attention to the source material than Taylor's critical reading of Reformed Christian lived experience and teaching evinces. The dissertation's methodology is empirical as a work of intellectual and

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<sup>80</sup> Craig Calhoun and Charles Taylor, "Authenticity and Meritocracy" in *Degenerations of Democracy*, 129–158, eds. Craig Calhoun, Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, and Charles Taylor (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022), 151, observes that "[t]erms such as 'cisgender' and 'postbinary' can both clarify and offer liberatory insight to those who take them up. There is good reason to seek an inclusive category—say, 'Latinx'—and to avoid genderings embedded in ordinary language. But it is almost inescapably the case that such terms do as much to make high-status education manifest as to advance social justice. We repeat: this doesn't mean the terms or uses are wrong—any more than wearing well-tailored clothes is wrong. It means that their use is at least implicitly and sometimes consciously a manifestation of meritocratic distinction from the less well-educated—who by implication have not only inferior understandings of justice but also inferior vocabularies." Calhoun and Taylor voice their concern as a "critique of [the] tacit elitism" in the new vocabulary, while affirming, "[w]e also think efforts to change habitual language can play a positive role in social change." *Ibid.*, 313. For the philosophy of language underpinning Taylor's progressive social theory, see Charles Taylor, *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

<sup>81</sup> Hebah Farrag, "The Spirit in Black Lives Matter: New Spiritual Community in Black Radical Organizing," *Transition*, no. 125 (2018): 76–88, 81: "The infusing of spirituality into black radical organizing is intentional, if you ask Patrisse Cullors." Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement, completed her first degree in Philosophy and Religion at UCLA in 2012.

<sup>82</sup> Jay, "Faith-Based History," 76. Citing Gianni Vattimo, "The Trace of the Trace," in *Religion*, 79–94, eds. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 81.

ecclesiastical history, but this contrast between Taylor's "Reform Master Narrative" and the ecclesiastical-historical Master Narrative of the history of redemption should be delineated.

This and the next chapter develop an analytic narrative history of Taylor's life from 1931 to 1970 with a focus on the forgotten sources of Taylor's self. It begins with his family background, his upbringing in Québec, and his studies at McGill in the context of Canadian secularization. It explores the formative intellectual, political, and spiritual influences on his life during this period, including the Canadian Social Gospel and the Catholic Action Movement, together with a consideration of the influence of his first wife, Alba Romer (1931–1990), who migrated to Canada after the Second World War, when her father, Tadeusz Romer (1894–1978), a former Polish ambassador to the USSR who had personally negotiated with Joseph Stalin (1878–1953) was appointed Professor of French at McGill. It also examines Taylor's formative years at the University of Oxford (1952–1961), where he was a French-Canadian Rhodes Scholar studying Politics, Philosophy, and Economics at Balliol College (1952–1955), and then Prize Fellow at All Souls College (1955–1961), where he wrote his DPhil thesis, "The Explanation of Behaviour in Social Science" under the supervision of Berlin and Elizabeth Anscombe (1919–2001). It surveys Taylor's involvement with the New Democratic Party through the 1960s and his four unsuccessful election campaigns. The chapter draws to a close by noting the influence of Taylor's teaching. After the publication of *Hegel* (1975), he was appointed to the Professorship of Social and Political Theory at Oxford in 1976, which he occupied for only five years before returning to Canada, but during that time he supervised doctoral work by Michael Sandel (b. 1953), Michael Rosen (b. 1952), and Frederick Beiser (b. 1949). It argues that a liberal Catholic socialist humanism is the guiding ideological thread of Taylor's intellectual biography.

Charles Margrave Taylor was born on 5 November 1931, in Montréal, Canada. His father, Walter Margrave Taylor (1887–1953), was an English-speaking Protestant from Toronto, a veteran of the First World War, and successful partner in a steel manufacturing company.<sup>83</sup> His mother, Simone Marguerite Taylor (1902–1970), was a Francophone Roman Catholic and dressmaker from the eminent Beaubien family in Montréal.<sup>84</sup> Despite a “kind of Voltairian, anti-clerical” influence from his grandfather, Taylor was raised as a Catholic and attended mass at Saint-Viateur d’Outremont Church.<sup>85</sup> Outremont, the town where he was raised, was “one of the most affluent, beautiful and picturesque residential communities” in Montréal, and Taylor’s politically prominent family had historic connections to this borough through his maternal line.<sup>86</sup> In 1875, Taylor’s great grandfather, Louis Beaubien (1837–1915), had co-founded the settlement after serving as an MP, changing its name from Côte-Sainte-Catherine to Outremont, and his “family estate was then the largest property in this new town.”<sup>87</sup> This line of the Beaubien family saw four successive generations of Parliamentarians; Louis was second. Louis’s father was Pierre Beaubien (1796–1881), who had trained as a doctor at the Académie de Paris, served as President of the Montréal School of Medicine and Surgery, and was also a representative of Montréal and Chambly in the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Canada.<sup>88</sup> While

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<sup>83</sup> Joshua Rothman, “How to Restore Your Faith in Democracy,” *The New Yorker*, 11 November 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/persons-of-interest/how-to-restore-your-faith-in-democracy>, accessed 19 May 2023. Rothman also states that Walter M. Taylor was a Senator, however there is no evidence of this in the [Canadian Parliamentarians database](https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en_CA/People/parliamentarians): [https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en\\_CA/People/parliamentarians](https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en_CA/People/parliamentarians).

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Mathien, Karen Grandy and Celine Cooper, “Charles Taylor,” in *The Canadian Encyclopaedia*, 24 June 2007, accessed 30 May 2023, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/charles-taylor>.

<sup>85</sup> Ben Rogers, “Charles Taylor Interviewed: The Canadian Philosopher Talks to Prospect about Religion, Multiculturalism, and the Future of the Left,” *Prospect*, 29 February 2008, accessed 19 May 2023, <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/society/history/52240/charles-taylor-interviewed>.

<sup>86</sup> Pierre Louis Lapointe, “Outremont,” in *The Canadian Encyclopaedia*, 7 February 2006, accessed 30 May 2023, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/outremont>.

<sup>87</sup> Fernande Roy, “BEAUBIEN, LOUIS,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 14, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed 22 May 2023, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/beaubien\\_louis\\_14E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/beaubien_louis_14E.html).

<sup>88</sup> Jacques Bernier, “BEAUBIEN, PIERRE,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 11, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed 22 May 2023, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/beaubien\\_pierre\\_11E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/beaubien_pierre_11E.html).

Louis' son, Taylor's "Voltairian, anti-clerical" grandfather, was Charles-Philippe Beaubien (1870–1949), a lawyer who served as a Canadian Senator for over thirty years, 1915–1949.<sup>89</sup> Fourthly, Taylor's uncle, Louis-Philippe Beaubien (1903–1985), was a stockbroker who also served in the Senate from 1960 to 1985.<sup>90</sup> Taylor's Toronto-based paternal line was marked with distinction through his uncle, Geoffrey Barron Taylor (1890–1915), who died in the First World War; Geoffrey Taylor was a two-time Olympic medallist studying at Trinity College, Oxford, before enlisting.<sup>91</sup> This was the highly distinguished and wealthy family that Charles Taylor was born into as the youngest of three children: his brother Joseph Geoffrey Beaubien Taylor (1929–1974) was an engineer who died tragically in a skiing accident, and his sister Gretta Chambers (1927–2017), married the Canadian MP, Egan Chambers (1921–1994), and following her prominent career in journalism was appointed Chancellor of McGill University.<sup>92</sup> Two of Taylor's ancestors, Pierre and Louis Beaubien, had also served as the twelfth and thirtieth Presidents of the Sociétés Saint-Jean-Baptiste de Montréal in 1859 and 1882 respectively.<sup>93</sup> This patriotic society was committed to representing Francophone interests in Québec, including the promulgation of the Roman Catholic faith—Charles-Philippe's "Voltairian" sentiments were therefore quite a rupture in the Beaubien family's historic Catholicism; yet he was an ardently pro-French Conservative Senator. Taylor gave some insight into these dimensions of his family life during an

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<sup>89</sup> "The Hon. Charles-Philippe Beaubien, P.C., K.C., Senator," *Parliament of Canada Biography*, accessed 22 May 2023, [https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en\\_CA/People/Profile?personId=5516](https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en_CA/People/Profile?personId=5516).

<sup>90</sup> "The Hon. Louis-Philippe Beaubien, Senator," *Parliament of Canada Biography*, accessed 22 May 2023, [https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en\\_CA/People/Profile?personId=4396](https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en_CA/People/Profile?personId=4396).

<sup>91</sup> "Lieutenant Geoffrey Barron Taylor," *Canadian Virtual War Memorial*, accessed 25 May 2023, <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/canadian-virtual-war-memorial/detail/1596534>; "Geoffrey Barron Taylor," *Olympics*, accessed 25 May 2023, <https://olympics.com/en/athletes/goeffrey-barron-taylor>.

<sup>92</sup> René Bruemmer, "Former McGill Chancellor and Prominent Montreal Journalist Gretta Chambers Dies at 90," *Montreal Gazette*, 10 September 2017, accessed 25 May 2023, <https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/former-mcgill-chancellor-and-prominent-montreal-journalist-gretta-chambers-dies-at-90>.

<sup>93</sup> "Les Présidents de la SSJB," *Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste De Montréal*, accessed 23 May 2023, <https://ssjb.com/ssjb/les-presidents-de-la-ssjb/>.

interview with Ben Rogers on “Religion, Multiculturalism, and the Future of the Left” (2008)—the scale of his family being “very involved in politics” was notably downplayed:

Ben Rogers: Did you come from a family of intellectuals?

Charles Taylor: My family was very involved in politics but there was nobody who would have thought of themselves as an intellectual. Even when I was very small, people around me were always talking politics. Of course, in the 1930s politics was Europe, Munich; and my family was fiercely anti-appeasement. But there were deep divisions across the francophone side of the family. My grandfather was, unlike most Quebec francophones, tremendously pro-French and therefore pro-involvement in the war and pro-conscription. But others disagreed and so there was tension.

Catherine Fieschi: It’s interesting that your grandfather was pro-French.

Charles Taylor: It was a rare thing for a Quebecois to have this complete love affair with France. For him, Paris was the centre of the universe. This was an axiom of my childhood. I thought everybody believed this. Even now, I’m surprised when others disagree. Is there anywhere else? (laughter).<sup>94</sup>

Paris was the centre of this Francophone family’s cultural imagination, and Taylor was drawn there as a student in the 1950s—his grandfather’s strongly pro-French stance in the 1930s was an expression of loyalty following his longstanding diplomatic engagement with the country.<sup>95</sup> Taylor came to self-awareness during this tumultuous period, when his grandfather was giving speeches in the Senate warning of the threat posed by Nazism: “I remember every major event after the middle of the nineteen-thirties.” He recorded. “The start of the war, the bombing of Madrid.”<sup>96</sup> As Joshua Rothman observed, “[t]he Second World War was the defining fact of Taylor’s childhood.”<sup>97</sup> This comes through in *A Secular Age*, where Taylor wrote charitably of his more conservative ancestors: “Catholics suspicious of democracy in the nineteenth century might not have seen some of its dangers

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<sup>94</sup> Rogers, “Charles Taylor Interviewed.”

<sup>95</sup> “In 1921 the Canadian government selected him to negotiate a reciprocal trade agreement with France, and he succeeded in bringing this very difficult undertaking to fruition. He was also entrusted with special missions to France in 1919, 1920, and 1922.” Frank Kunz, *The Modern Senate of Canada 1925–1963: A Re-Appraisal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 61.

<sup>96</sup> Rothman, “How to Restore Your Faith in Democracy.”

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

and weaknesses more clearly than we do as children of the twentieth century, who had to defend democracy against various gruesome forms of tyranny.”<sup>98</sup> Taylor was one of these “children of the twentieth century,” born into an elite French-Canadian Catholic family.

Although his mother’s Catholicism held spiritual sway over the waned Protestantism of his capitalist father—a fact which undoubtedly shaped his assessment of religion and modernity in *A Secular Age*—his father’s influence was pronounced through his education. Taylor initially attended the prestigious Selwyn House School (1939–1946), which was known as the school for the Anglophone elite in Montréal; he was a Prefect, Literary Editor of the School Magazine, and President of the Debating Society.<sup>99</sup> At Selwyn House Taylor developed his Romantic sensibility under the tutelage of the English poet, Patrick Anderson (1915–1979), an alumnus of Oxford and Columbia universities, and former President of the Oxford Union: “one of the greatest teachers I’ve ever had,” Taylor said. “He taught us the English Romantic poets and just at that age, you know I was fourteen and so on, I was completely, completely bowled over, particularly by Keats, I mean there’s just something that you know, set my life in a certain direction.”<sup>100</sup> When Taylor won the Blue Metropolis International Literary Grand Prize in 2018, he credited Anderson’s influence once again: “He made the Romantic period, particularly Keats, really live for me, and I’ve never turned back from that.”<sup>101</sup> Ian McGillis noted that Taylor was awarded this literary accolade largely for his achievements in *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age*, “both are deeply informed by

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<sup>98</sup> *ASA*, 753.

<sup>99</sup> James D. Ross, ed., *Selwyn House School Magazine: Vol. 18, For the School Year 1945–1946* (Montreal: Selwyn House School, 1946), 24.

<sup>100</sup> David Cayley and Charles Taylor, “Charles Taylor: The Malaise of Modernity, Part One,” *Ideas: CBC Radio-Canada*, 11 April 2011, accessed 27 May 2023, <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/charles-taylor-the-malaise-of-modernity/id946777391?i=1000356041372>; cf. Anthony Palma, “Recognition of Diversity: Charles Taylor’s Educational Thought,” PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2014, 7. See also, David O’Rourke, “Anderson, Patrick (1915–79),” in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds., William Toye and Eugene Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>101</sup> Ian McGillis, “Blue Metropolis: Poetry and Philosophy Intertwine for Charles Taylor,” *Montreal Gazette*, 13 April 2018, accessed 26 May 2023, <https://montrealgazette.com/entertainment/local-arts/blue-metropolis-poetry-and-philosophy-intertwine-for-charles-taylor>.

the artistic and poetic sensibility he absorbed in his teens.”<sup>102</sup> This was an apt characterization: Taylor’s work is suffused with Romanticist ideas, and when Colin Jager critiqued Taylor’s historical writing for betraying a Romanticized view of the Middle Ages, Taylor responded: “I plead guilty as charged: I am a hopeless German Romantic of the 1790s.”<sup>103</sup> Patrick Anderson taught Taylor again as an undergraduate at McGill University, but before his degree Taylor attended Trinity College School in Port Hope, Ontario (1946–1949). He found the school to be “very WASP, very Toronto WASP,” and felt there was “some contempt for the other side of my, as it were, background and identity.”<sup>104</sup> He perceived this in “the kind of remarks that were made about French Canadians, including in front of me [laughs] because I’m called Charles Taylor, why should anybody suspect that I would take this amiss, and I was very discreet.”<sup>105</sup> Taylor’s capacity for discretion regarding his background and identity was clearly well-developed at this early stage; some of his other interests—such as writing poetry and listening to classical music alone for hours—might have exacerbated the challenge of fitting in, especially as he considered the school to be marked by “a certain philistinism,” but nevertheless he thrived at the school: he was appointed President of the Debating Society and designated Head Boy.<sup>106</sup> His writing in the *Trinity College School Record*, “clearly shows that he believed faith was under siege by scepticism,” according to Robert Meynell.<sup>107</sup> Yet as Mark Noll observed in his presidential address to the American Society of Church History, “What Happened to Christian Canada?”

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Charles Taylor, “Afterword,” in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, 320; for Jager’s essay, see: “This Detail, This History: Charles Taylor’s Romanticism,” in *Varieties of Secularism*, 166–192. For the connection between Patrick Anderson and English Romantics, Hegel and the German Romantics in Taylor’s thought see, Charles Taylor and Jonathan Guilbault, *Avenues of Faith: Conversations with Jonathan Guilbault*, trans. Yanette Shalter (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 22.

<sup>104</sup> Cayley and Taylor, “Charles Taylor: The Malaise of Modernity, Part One.”

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.; A. H. Humble, *The School on the Hill: Trinity College School, 1865–1965* (Ontario: Trinity College School, 1965), 282.

<sup>107</sup> Robert Meynell, *Canadian Idealism and the Philosophy of Freedom: C.B. Macpherson, George Grant, and Charles Taylor* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011), 166.

(2006): “As late as 1961, only one-half of one percent of Canadian citizens told census takers that they were not attached to any religious body.”<sup>108</sup> Moreover, in a survey taken after the Second World War, the number of Catholics in Québec who had attended mass within the last seven days was “a stratospheric 90 percent.”<sup>109</sup> Noll concludes that in 1950, “church attendance in Quebec may have been the highest in the world.”<sup>110</sup> Taylor’s involvement with various Christian groups as a student, discussed below, should not therefore be considered peculiar; the interesting aspect of his formation was the kind of student Christian groups he was involved with.

Taylor’s undergraduate years studying History at McGill University from 1949 to 1952 were the pivotal time in both his religious and political development. “I was political in Quebec, in Canada,” he recounted in an interview with Andrew Whitehead, “I think I became a social democrat of some kind in my last year [at McGill], then I got the Rhodes Scholarship. And so I came [to Oxford] as a Leftist of some kind.”<sup>111</sup> There were a number of influences that converged upon Taylor during these years at McGill that demonstrably helped to make him into “a Leftist of some kind”, including the Catholic Action Movement, the journal *Cité Libre*, and Student Christian Movement. David Cayley recorded this shift in Taylor’s political alignment quite specifically, noting that “as a student at McGill he had already been politically active, first as a Liberal, and then moving left to the CCF.”<sup>112</sup>

The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) was a political party operative in Québec, affiliated with the Socialist International. It was founded in 1932 by James S. Woodsworth (1874–1942), a Methodist minister and radical preacher of the Social

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<sup>108</sup> Mark A. Noll, “What Happened to Christian Canada?” *Church History*, vol. 75, no. 2 (2006): 245–273, 249.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Andrew Whitehead and Charles Taylor, “The New Left: Chuck Taylor,” *Andrew Whitehead*, 9 February 2021, <https://www.andrewwhitehead.net/new-left-chuck-taylor.html>.

<sup>112</sup> Cayley and Taylor, “Charles Taylor: The Malaise of Modernity, Part One,”

Gospel.<sup>113</sup> In the early twentieth century, Woodsworth had lost his orthodox Christian faith, “[t]he mystery of the Trinity, the doctrine of the two natures in one person, he rejected as ‘both inconclusive and unnecessary.’”<sup>114</sup> Increasingly aware of his own heterodoxy, he resigned from the Methodist Church and founded the so-called “Labour church,” which was fuelled by a pantheistic Socialist mysticism, “torn between the Bible and Marx”: “If it is in Him that we live and move and have our being,” Woodsworth proclaimed, “then worship of an external Deity will be replaced by Spiritual Communion and co-operation.”<sup>115</sup> Taylor’s modernist Catholicism corresponds with this; Anthony Palma has suggested that “Taylor has a low (i.e. human) Christology, rather than a high (i.e. divine) Christology.”<sup>116</sup> And Woodsworth’s immanentized vision of “Spiritual Communion” correlates with Taylor’s constructive ecclesiology of divinization, where “[t]he enfleshment of God extends outward...into a network, which we call the Church.”<sup>117</sup> Behind both Taylor and Woodsworth loomed the towering influence of Hegel, who taught that the idea of the God-man represented the unity of humanity and Absolute Spirit, and that the Church had become the Body of Christ in the sense that it was a vehicle of this consciousness.<sup>118</sup>

Woodsworth had died nearly ten years before Taylor was attracted to the CCF Party, but Taylor was drawn into the student milieu that Woodsworth and other social gossellers had helped to generate. This was principally through his contact with the Student Christian

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<sup>113</sup> Allen Mills, *Fool for Christ: The Political Thought of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1991).

<sup>114</sup> Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1959), 20.

<sup>115</sup> Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914–28* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 100; Oscar Cole-Arnal, “Liberation Theology Canadian Style: J.S. Woodsworth’s ‘The First Story of the Labor Church’ (1920),” *Consensus*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1993): 99–120, 117. See also, Neil Johnson, *The Labour Church: The Movement and Its Message* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018) and Mark Bevir, “The Labour Church Movement, 1891–1902,” *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 38, no. 2 (1999): 217–245.

<sup>116</sup> Palma, *Recognition of Diversity*, 16.

<sup>117</sup> ASA, 739.

<sup>118</sup> Woodsworth had studied philosophy at Oxford with the British Hegelian and Master of Balliol College, Edward Caird (1835–1908), see A. B. McKillop, *Contours of Canadian Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 107–108.

Movement. Taylor explained this in an interview with Jonathan Guilbault, where he identified some of his earliest intellectual and spiritual influences from the 1950s.

Admittedly, at McGill, I met some people who had a lasting influence on my life, namely amid the Student Christian Movement, a Protestant group open to Catholics like myself. We would discuss what it meant to have faith at a political level, in the context of living together. I used to find these exchanges of ideas very stimulating, and they probably participated in the development of my thoughts.<sup>119</sup>

Discussing “what it meant to have faith at a political level, in the context of living together” is a rather innocuous-sounding Taylorian gloss on SCM conversations, considering that the early social gospellers had preached: “Co-operation in commerce and industry is the real Holy Communion.”<sup>120</sup> Indeed the ideological alliance between the SCM, Woodsworth, and the wider network of Canadian intellectuals that would establish the CCF was axiomatic. Richard Allen recorded that even “[a]s the election of 1921 approached, it was apparent that the social gospel in the student world—that is, among the leadership of the nascent Student Christian Movement (SCM)—was fully in accord with the developing progressive alliance in politics.”<sup>121</sup> The SCM and CCF nexus at McGill University had grown through the 1930s during the years of the Great Depression and under the leadership of a rising political and academic star, Eugene A. Forsey (1904–1991), who taught at McGill from 1929 to 1940 and leveraged his academic position to expand the work of the SCM whilst acting as president of the Québec CCF. Forsey affiliated with the Oxford SCM while he was a Rhodes Scholar at Balliol College; he went to Oxford as a Conservative but under the influence of sermons in the College Chapel from Balliol’s Master, A. D. Lindsay (1879–1952), he “learned of Christian Socialism.”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Taylor and Guilbault, *Avenues of Faith*, 2–3.

<sup>120</sup> McKillop, *Contours of Canadian Thought*, 107.

<sup>121</sup> Allen, *The Social Passion*, 213.

<sup>122</sup> Frank Milligan, “Eugene A. Forsey: An Intellectual Biography,” PhD dissertation, University of Alberta, 1987, 99.

The connection between numerous Canadian intellectuals and the Socialist theory that was fomenting at Oxford from the late nineteenth century was essential to the radical currents of Progressivism in twentieth-century Canadian political life. Successive waves of Leftist influence washed over Canada's intellectual shores as bright young minds—Woodsworth, Forsey, Frank Underhill (1889–1971), Francis R. Scott (1899–1985), J. King Gordon (1900–1989), David Lewis (1909–1981), and Edward Jolliffe (1909–1998); all CCF luminaries—returned from Balliol, Lincoln, Magdalen, or Mansfield steeped in a mixture of British Idealism, Christian Socialism, and Fabianism (often courtesy of Cecil Rhodes (1853–1902)).<sup>123</sup> As students they had overlapped through various Oxford networks; for example, as Frank Milligan recorded:

[King] Gordon had also been an SCM member while he was at Oxford, where he met Frank Scott, a fellow Oxford student whom Forsey had also met there. According to Gordon, both he and Forsey had their “comfortable social philosophies shaken up by the likes of Shaw, Tawney, Hobson, Cole, and the Webbs, either in person or bursting out very much alive from the cover of books or declaring from the Oxford stage.”<sup>124</sup>

Milligan gives a glimpse into the complex web of relationships and lines of influence between the internally diverse movement of British socialists and the Canadian students who variously met them, listened to them, or read their work. One of the figures who most compellingly linked the emerging generation of Canadian Progressives with the established generation of British socialists was Frank Underhill, a Flavelle Scholar at Balliol College who became a member of the Fabian Society through A. D. Lindsay during his time in England.<sup>125</sup> He returned to Canada to teach History—first at the University of Saskatchewan and then at the University of Toronto—and was vitally involved with the CCF. In April

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<sup>123</sup> Michiel Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction: Intellectual Origins of the Democratic Left in Canada, 1930–1942* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

<sup>124</sup> Frank Milligan, *Eugene A. Forsey: An Intellectual Biography* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004), 74.

<sup>125</sup> R. Douglas Francis, *Frank H. Underhill: Intellectual Provocateur* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 23.

1929, Woodsworth had written to Underhill expressing his desire for “something more or less corresponding to the English Fabian Society” to feature in Canadian politics.<sup>126</sup> Underhill, together with F. R. Scott, spearheaded this endeavour by founding the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR) in 1931–1932; it was the unofficial CCF thinktank, which authored the party’s founding document, *The Regina Manifesto* (1933): “No C.C.F. Government will rest”, the manifesto stated, “until it has eradicated capitalism and put into operation the full programme of socialized planning which will lead to the establishment in Canada of the Cooperative Commonwealth.”<sup>127</sup> Taylor was aligned with this radical socialist Party by 1952, and the New Democratic Party (NDP), which Taylor co-founded (with F. R. Scott) in 1961 was understood as the CCF’s direct successor.

Scott had converted to Fabian Socialism during his time as a Rhodes Scholar at Magdalen College (1920–1923), and taught Law at McGill from 1928, becoming Dean of the Faculty in 1961.<sup>128</sup> He also served as National Chairman of the CCF from 1942 to 1950, was involved with the SCM, and founded the modernist Canadian poetry journal, *Preview*, in 1942 with Patrick Anderson—Taylor’s favoured teacher from Selwyn House—who taught at McGill from 1948 to 1950.<sup>129</sup> It is not difficult to see therefore how Taylor could have been attracted to this radical movement on the McGill campus, or why he pursued the Rhodes Scholarship to study Politics, Philosophy, and Economics at Balliol in 1952 when he was already aligned with the CCF, as Cayley noted. “I was already very interested and involved in politics,” Taylor explained in his Kyoto Prize lecture, “and I saw my studies then as a preparation for a life where political action would dominate. I mean that in the

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<sup>126</sup> Cited in Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction*, 19.

<sup>127</sup> The full text of the CCF’s *Regina Manifesto* is available in Walter D. Young, *The Anatomy of a Party: The National CCF 1932–61* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969; reprinted 2018), 304–313, quotation at 313.

<sup>128</sup> Sandra Djwa, *The Politics of the Imagination: A Life of F. R. Scott* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 48.

<sup>129</sup> Justin Edwards, “Engendering Modern Canadian Poetry: Preview, First Statement, and the Disclosure of Patrick Anderson’s Homosexuality,” *Essays on Canadian Writing*, vol. 62 (1997): 65–84.

broadest sense, not just party political activity.”<sup>130</sup> Born into an elite political family, it was not surprising that Taylor might have this aspiration. His understanding of “political action...in the broadest sense,” was likely developed through his involvement with the CCF and his exposure to Fabianism.

King Gordon’s letter recorded that R. H. Tawney (1880–1962), G.D.H. Cole (1889–1959), Beatrice Webb (1858–1943), and Sidney Webb (1859–1947) had influenced the generation of Canadian intellectuals that established the CCF. These British socialists were all members of the Fabian Society—the inspiration for the Canadian LSR, noted above.<sup>131</sup> Named after the Roman General, Quintus Fabius Maximus Cunctator (c.203–280BC), and his strategy in a war of attrition against Hannibal, Fabian Socialists adopted their motto: “*For the right moment you must wait, as Fabius did, but when the right moment comes you must strike hard, or your waiting will have been vain and fruitless.*”<sup>132</sup> Cole relayed this in his tract on *The Fabian Society: Past and Present* (1942): “That is the attitude”, he affirmed, “to which the Fabian Society has remained constant throughout its history.”<sup>133</sup> Founded in 1884, the Fabian Society had emerged out of The Fellowship of the New Life—a London-based group of mystical utopians who drew inspiration from New England Transcendentalism.<sup>134</sup> According to Fabian Society member, Bernard Shaw (1856–1950), members of the Fellowship had wanted to “sit among the dandelions” but the Fabians set themselves to “organize the docks” and were committed to enacting socialist policy rather

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<sup>130</sup> Taylor, “What Drove Me to Philosophy?” 179.

<sup>131</sup> Young, *The Anatomy of a Party*, 134; Allan Irving, “Canadian Fabians: The Work and Thought of Harry Cassidy and Leonard Marsh, 1930–1945,” *Canadian Journal of Social Work Education / Revue Canadienne d’éducation En Service Social*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1981): 7–28, 8; for Tawney’s aloof membership of the Fabian Society, see Lawrence Goldman, *The Life of R. H. Tawney: Socialism and History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 170–171.

<sup>132</sup> G.D.H. Cole, “The Fabian Society: Past and Present,” in *G.D.H. Cole: Early Pamphlets and Assessment*, ed. Noel Thompson (London: Routledge, 2011), 2. Emphasis original.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Mark Bevir, “British Socialism and American Romanticism,” *The English Historical Review*, vol. CX, no. 438 (1995): 878–901, esp. 885–889.

than dabbling in experimental forms of communal life.<sup>135</sup> Mark Bevir has written compellingly of the Fabian Society's internal variety, highlighted their "fluid and diverse political strategies", and explored how different approaches to "permeation" were articulated, pursued, and developed by Bernard Shaw and Sidney Webb from the 1880s.<sup>136</sup> Shaw initially advocated that Fabians work to permeate the Liberal Party and draw its radicals over to a new socialist Party; Webb, on the other hand, perceived that "nothing in England is done without the consent of a small intellectual yet practical class in London not 2000 in number" so he conceived of permeation through "Fabian experts showing politicians what policies were necessary for an efficient society."<sup>137</sup> The Webbian approach of cultivating and applying technocratic expertise through the Civil Service was a principal strategy of the Canadian Fabians at the LSR, and the policy proposals they disseminated through their five-hundred-page volume, *Social Planning for Canada* (1935), eventually lay at the heart of the Canadian welfare system as Michiel Horn and Allan Irving have demonstrated.<sup>138</sup> Subtextual ideas of Christian apologetics and evangelism were another point of continuity behind the Fabian strategy of "permeation" as it was pursued in both Britain and Canada. Woodsworth, also President of the LSR, alluded to 1 Peter 3:15 in his foreword to *Social Planning for Canada*: "Every C.C.F. member ought to be able to give a reason for the faith that is in him."<sup>139</sup> Cole, similarly, evoked evangelical motifs in *The Fabian Society: Past and Present*: "It is the Fabian view that the 'good news' of Socialism needs putting squarely and realistically before everyone, in every class and group, who can be persuaded to listen to it."<sup>140</sup> When Cole wrote of Fabian accomplishments in the context

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<sup>135</sup> Cited in Kevin Manton, "The Fellowship of the New Life: English Ethical Socialism Reconsidered," *History of Political Thought*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2003): 282–304, 282. Manton's article contested this caricatural dichotomy.

<sup>136</sup> Mark Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011),

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 170–171.

<sup>138</sup> The Research Committee of the League for Social Reconstruction, *Social Planning for Canada* (Toronto: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1935); Irving, "Canadian Fabians."; Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction*.

<sup>139</sup> The Research Committee of the League for Social Reconstruction, *Social Planning for Canada*, vi.

<sup>140</sup> Cole, "The Fabian Society," in *G.D.H. Cole: Early Pamphlets and Assessment*, 3.

of “permeation,” he used the language of conversion: “Persons who had been converted by Fabian propaganda”, he claimed, “were largely responsible for the social legislation passed by the Liberal Government after 1906.”<sup>141</sup> Cole also described the strategy of permeation as “trying to convert those who hold key positions”.<sup>142</sup> Although this idea was castigated as elitist, it was not a limited approach that focused solely on the conversion of “a few leading officials”, Cole explained: “Far from it.”<sup>143</sup>

The person whom the Fabian Society, on this side of its work, most wishes to convert is the man or woman who is in the best position for influencing others, either over a wide area or in his or her comparatively narrow group. Such persons may be civil servants or professional men and women or Trade Union or Co-operative leaders, local as well as national, or parsons with a loyal following in their own churches, or speakers with a gift for moving men, or regimental officers or common soldiers, or shop stewards. They may be business men who have realised the futility of capitalism, or scientists, or teachers in school or university—or students.<sup>144</sup>

This wide scope of potential converts (including students, clergy, and civil servants) was effectively targeted by Tawney through his Christian socialist history, aimed at the educated reading class of British society with a view to broadly permeating the country’s intellectual life. When he died in 1962, the *New Left Review* published an extract from *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (1926), “On the Puritan Character,” to remember his contribution to Socialist thought.<sup>145</sup> Unsurprisingly for a Society that had a “Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing” as its logo, infiltrating the churches proved an effective strategy of Fabian permeation: F. R. Scott was converted reading *Christianity and Industrial Problems* (1919) with the Oxford Student Christian Union 1920–1921, and Tawney had sat on the Archbishops’ Committee

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 3–4.

<sup>145</sup> R. H. Tawney, “On the Puritan Character,” *New Left Review*, vol. 13 (1962): n.p.; R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: A Historical Study* (London: John Murray, 1926).

which had drafted the report.<sup>146</sup> Taylor's conversion followed a similar pattern insofar as he encountered socialist beliefs through the Anglophone side of his identity. At McGill the Student Christian Movement mediated themes and ideas of the Canadian Social Gospel and was informally but closely linked with the CCF Party. Leaders of the Party were rising stars or prominent members of the university's academic staff, with Fabian vision for the conversion and recruitment of their students. This Fabian presence at McGill had been longstanding: from Harold Laski (1893–1950), who taught there from 1914 to 1916; to Leonard Marsh (1906–1983), who graduated from the London School of Economics in 1928, was a member of the LSR, co-author of *Social Planning for Canada*, and Director of Social Research at McGill from 1930 to 1941; and Eugene A. Forsey, who overlapped with Marsh and cultivated the SCM/CCF nexus. Therefore, when Taylor arrived at McGill in 1949, there were already lively hotbeds of socialist thought, and he was converted from the Liberal Party to the CCF. Later, at Oxford, after Taylor followed the well-trodden path of the CCF elite through a Rhodes Scholarship to Balliol, he co-founded and co-edited the *Universities and Left Review* and called upon G.D.H. Cole—the first Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at All Souls College and President of the Fabian Society—to contribute an article to the inaugural issue: “What is Happening to British Capitalism?”<sup>147</sup> As an undergraduate, Taylor was drawn into and groomed for leadership within the Anglo-Canadian Socialist movement.

Socialist influences appealed to Taylor from the Francophone Catholic side of his background and identity as well during this time at McGill. He indicated this while discussing his religious development.

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<sup>146</sup> Djwa, *The Politics of Imagination*, 51; Church of England Archbishops' Fifth Committee of Inquiry, *Christianity and Industrial Problems: Being the Report of the Archbishops' Fifth Committee of Inquiry, Part One* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919).

<sup>147</sup> G.D.H. Cole, “What is Happening to British Capitalism?” *Universities and Left Review*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1957): 24–27.

David Goodhart: How did religion come into your life? Was it always there?

Charles Taylor: No, it wasn't always there. At a certain moment, I got interested in God. My background is very varied... So there was no single model to cleave to. Our parish was St Viateur d'Outremont—a very special parish. I was very impressed by the tremendous oratorical quotes of the sermons. So I learned my rhetoric from that. But no, I didn't have a faith that came from the Bible. I think the really decisive thing in my religious development was that around 1950–52, a great deal of new French-written theology—which eventually inspired Vatican II—was circulating through the media in Quebec, *Cité Libre* and so on. I read all this stuff: it gave me a sense of what I felt, what I wanted to believe. At that point, it was a hopeless minority theology. Later, to my astonishment, it became the official story of Vatican II.<sup>148</sup>

So, Taylor's pivotal religious development occurred between 1950 and 1952, the period when he was drawn to the CCF. He “didn't have a faith that came from the Bible” but as an undergraduate found theology that articulated the intuition, which he described in his Kyoto Prize lecture, of “a higher place” beyond his childhood garden connected with the political transformation of human beings; “it gave me a sense of what I felt, what I wanted to believe.” This was the “new French-written theology” circulating in the journal *Cité Libre* (Free City). Pierre Trudeau (1919–2000), an emerging juggernaut of Canadian politics and later Taylor's electoral rival, had co-founded *Cité Libre* with Gérard Pelletier (1919–1997) and Jean Marchand (1918–1988) in 1950 to oppose the Conservative *Union Nationale* government led by Maurice Duplessis (1890–1959).<sup>149</sup> Indeed Trudeau saw *Cité Libre* as a “revolutionary journal”.<sup>150</sup> It was pitched at young people, as the preamble to the first issue explained: “Each of our articles is intended as an invitation to those thirty and under who have not yet spoken out, to those who have had the opportunity but have not been able to

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<sup>148</sup> Rogers, “Charles Taylor Interviewed.”

<sup>149</sup> Raymond Hudon, “Cité libre,” in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History*, ed. Gerald Hallowell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Lise Gauvin, “Literary Magazines in Quebec,” in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>150</sup> Christo Aivalis, *The Constant Liberal: Pierre Trudeau, Organized Labour, and the Canadian Social Democratic Left* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018), 10.

say what is closest to their hearts.”<sup>151</sup> The French Roman Catholic theologian and proponent of Personalism, Emmanuel Mounier (1905–1950), supplied the theological and intellectual resources for *Cité Libre*’s progressive Catholic critique of Duplessis through his monthly periodical *Esprit*. The Cité libristes heartily acknowledged this in their obituary for Mounier:

The most distracted of our readers can verify in each page of *Cité Libre*, not only the influence exerted on each of us by the magazine *Esprit*, but also a certain concern for clear-sightedness, which we want to become more and more profound, and this desire comes to us in a direct line from Emmanuel Mounier. The founders of *Cité Libre* had decided, from their first meetings, to have the first copy of the magazine sent to the director of *Esprit* just as it rolled off the press. It is enough to say that *Cité Libre* was born under the sign of *Esprit*, in loyalty to the same values for which Mounier fought until the last day.<sup>152</sup>

As Anglo-Canadian Socialists drew many of their ideas from Oxford and London, the French-Canadian Left looked to Paris for inspiration.

After Pope Pius XI (1857–1939) condemned the far-right royalist movement, *Action Française* in 1926, there was a vacuum in French Catholic political philosophy. Jacques Maritain (1882–1973) distanced himself from *Action Française* following the papal condemnation and supported Mounier in founding *Esprit* in 1932 as a forum for a rising generation of French Catholic intellectuals and political thinkers.<sup>153</sup> Due to his robust neo-Thomist commitments, Maritain soon separated himself from the conversation unfolding on the pages of the new journal to focus on elaborating a metaphysical system that might

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<sup>151</sup> La Rédaction, “Règle de jeu,” *Cité Libre*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1950): 1–3, 1. “Chacun de nos articles veut être une invitation à ceux de trente ans et moins qui n’ont pas encore parlé, à ceux-là aussi qui en ont eu l’occasion mais qui n’ont pas pu dire ce qui leur tenait le plus à cœur.”

<sup>152</sup> Anonymous, “Faites vos jeux,” *Cité Libre*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1950): 37–39, 37. “Le plus distrait de nos lecteurs peut vérifier dans chaque page de *Cité Libre*, non seulement l’influence qu’a exercée sur chacun de nous la revue *Esprit* mais encore un certain souci de lucidité, que nous voulons de plus en plus profond, et dont le désir nous vient en ligne droite d’Emmanuel Mounier. Les instigateurs de *Cité Libre* avaient décidé, dès leurs premières rencontres, de faire tenir au directeur d’*Esprit* la première copie de la revue qui sortirait des presses. C’est assez dire que *Cité Libre* est née sous le signe d’*Esprit*, en fidélité aux mêmes valeurs pour lesquelles Mounier s’est battu jusqu’au dernier jour.”

<sup>153</sup> John Hellman, “The Opening to the Left in French Catholicism: The Role of the Personalists,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 34, no. 3 (1973): 381–390, 384; Dries Deweer, “Mounier and Landsberg on the Person as Citizen: The Political Theory of the Early *Esprit* Movement,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 88, no. 3 (2014): 487–510.

underpin Christian Democracy, but Mounier, as John Hellman put it, “identified his life with that of the review which became the central intellectual organ for a generation of the Catholic Left.”<sup>154</sup> The Personalist movement that *Esprit* represented was guided by a shared progressive spiritual sensibility that transcended confessional lines, but has eluded precise definition. It is sympathetically presented as a socialist third way between the totalitarian pitfalls of Communism and Fascism directed by a principled prioritization of individual dignity, inspired by a spiritual vision of life; in Mounier’s *Manifeste au service du personnalisme* (1936), he explained:

We firmly believe—and in this we approach Marxism—that an incarnate spirituality, when menaced in its body, has the primary duty of freeing itself and of freeing men from the oppressive civilization rather than seeking refuge in fears, regrets or exhortations. Against Marxism, however, we affirm that there is no human civilization or culture that is not oriented metaphysically. Only a program that looks beyond effort and production, a science that looks beyond utility, an art that looks beyond agreement, and finally a personal life devoted to a spiritual reality that carries each one beyond himself—are capable of lifting the weight of a dead past and giving birth to a truly new order.<sup>155</sup>

It is self-evident how this “new French-written theology circulating in Quebec” appealed to Taylor as an articulation of his non-biblical spiritual intuitions connected with a vision for the political transformation of human life. When Taylor was interviewed by Bryan Magee (1930–2019) for the BBC television series, *Men of Ideas* (1977–1978), to discuss Marxist philosophy, he elucidated the explanatory power of Marxist social theory, but stressed that “there’s also another dimension, a theory of liberation which I think accounts for the

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<sup>154</sup> Hellman, “The Opening to the Left in French Catholicism,” 384. John Hellman, the leading anglophone scholar of Mounier and the French Personalist movement teaches at McGill University, see John Hellman, *Emmanuel Mounier and the New Catholic Left, 1930–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981). See Taylor’s appreciative review: Charles Taylor, “Emmanuel Mounier and the Catholic Left, 1930–50 (review).” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 21, no. 3 (1983): 414–416. For Maritain’s early work see, Jacques Maritain, *Three Reformers: Luther, Descartes, Rousseau* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1928); for his later work, Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism; Freedom in the Modern World; And, A Letter on Independence* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), and Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy and The Rights of Man and the Natural Law*, trans. Doris C. Anson (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2011).

<sup>155</sup> Emmanuel Mounier, *A Personalist Manifesto*, trans. Monks of St. John’s Abbey (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1938), 7.

immense importance and excitement that this theory has generated for the last century.”<sup>156</sup> Mounier and the French Catholic Left appropriated this theory of liberation into a liberal Catholic spirituality that was decidedly pluralist in outlook, seeking “a personal life devoted to a spiritual reality that carries each one beyond himself...giving birth to a truly new order.” The emancipatory thrust of Catholic Personalism was a powerful rhetorical and ideological resource for Trudeau in his literary campaign against Duplessis in a deeply Catholic political setting. Behind Mounier’s Leftist Catholicism stood Charles Péguy (1873–1914), a Catholic Socialist whom Taylor carefully explicated in the final chapter of *A Secular Age*.<sup>157</sup> A survey of Taylor’s footnotes for that concluding chapter, “Conversions” pp.728–772, indicates the extent of his debt to this locus of theological reflection, and especially Mounier’s book, *La Pensée de Charles Péguy* (1931), which he cited on fourteen occasions.<sup>158</sup> He highlighted Péguy’s influence on modern Catholic theology through later French theologians with the following observation:

It is not hard to recognize in Péguy some of the themes which became central to the reforms of Vatican II...indeed, there was a line of influence here. Much of the crucial theological writing which laid the intellectual groundwork for the Council came from France. I am thinking of Congar, Daniélou, de Lubac. Their prime intellectual sources were the Fathers, but they emerged from a milieu of Catholic thought and sensibility which had been marked by Péguy.<sup>159</sup>

Hence Taylor justifies the claim that to his “astonishment” the theology of Péguy, Mounier, and the French Catholic Left, mediated through figures like Yves Congar (1904–1995) and Henri de Lubac (1896–1991), “became the official story of Vatican II.” Péguy’s influence also extended to Italy, and to the secretary of the Italian Communist Party, Antonio Gramsci. For on 19 April 1916, Gramsci had written:

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<sup>156</sup> Charles Taylor and Bryan Magee, “Marxist Philosophy,” *Men of Ideas*, BBC Television (1978), accessed 15 March 2023, via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5v6U1SJdtU>. The conversation was published in Bryan Magee, ed., “Marxist Philosophy,” in *Men of Ideas*, 42–58 (New York: Viking Press, 1978).

<sup>157</sup> ASA, 745–754.

<sup>158</sup> ASA, 846–847, notes 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35.

<sup>159</sup> ASA, 752.

We reread a book we love so much, *Notre jeunesse* by Charles Péguy, and become intoxicated with that mystical religious sense of socialism, of justice, that pervades it all...in Péguy's prose we feel expressed with superhuman emptiness, with tremors of unspeakable emotion, many of those feelings which pervade us, and which matter little to us to be acknowledged. We feel in us a new life, a more vibrant faith than usual, and the polemical miseries of the little politicians crassly materialistic in the determination of motives, have only the virtue of making us more haughty.<sup>160</sup>

Taylor's academic focus in "philosophical anthropology" from the time of his doctoral work has sought to rebut "crassly materialistic" conceptions of human agency; it might be assumed that this concern is animated straightforwardly by his Catholicism, but it is also proximate to revolutionary socialist emphases, and Taylor was engaging with Gramsci's work when he was writing his DPhil and involved with the British New Left. Furthermore, as Walter L. Adamson observed, Gramsci was reading French romantic socialist writing by figures such as Péguy, Romain Rolland (1866–1944), Henri Barbusse (1873–1935), and Georges Sorel (1847–1922) during the period 1916–1917, and "[w]hat all these writers had in common was an intense preoccupation with the category of 'will' and a moralism aimed at renewing the 'consciousness' of the masses through education and culture."<sup>161</sup> Gramsci therefore appears as a dedicated political operative and strategist who crystallized antecedent insights from diverse sources, including a Roman Catholic thinker such as Péguy, into a fresh theory of culturalist Marxism. Anthony Crézégut's research on the early reception of Gramsci in France noted how Gramsci's work was circulated back into the Catholic Left through Mounier, and on the pages of *Esprit* in 1948:

Mounier had heard of Gramsci through his discussions with Italian left-wing Christian-democrats and fellow travellers of the Italian

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<sup>160</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Sotto la Mole, 1916–1920* (Torino: Einaudi, 1960), 77: "Noi rileggiamo un libro che tanto amiamo, *Notre jeunesse* di Carlo Péguy, e ci inebriamo di quel senso mistico religioso del socialismo, della giustizia, che tutto lo pervade... Eppure nella prosa del Péguy sentiamo espressi con empito sovrumano, con tremanti di commozione indicibili, molti di quei sentimenti che pi pervadono, e che importa poco ci siano riconosciuti. Sentiamo in noi una vita nuova, una fede piú vibrante del solito e le miserie polemiche dei piccoli politicanti crassamente materialisti nella determinazione dei moventi, hanno solo la virtù di renderci piú alteri."

<sup>161</sup> Walter L. Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 33–34.

Communist Party (PCI) at a Congress of the personalist movement, and he fell in love with the description they gave of this open-minded communist of whom he formerly knew only by hearsay....In 1948, in a famous issue of *Espirit [sic]*, Mounier made of Gramsci the symbol of an ‘open Marxism’ and opposed this image to a ‘scholastic Marxism’, the Marxism represented by the PCF and by Garaudy, the official philosopher of the party.<sup>162</sup>

From *Espirit* to *Cité Libre* the Gramscian ideas of the French Catholic Left began to permeate Québec.

Noll’s study of secularization in Québec applied insights from sociological work by David Martin (1929–2019), which perceived patterns of socio-structural continuity in the mechanisms of both Christianization and de-Christianization in Western nations.<sup>163</sup> For example, “Russia’s top-down, czarist, state-sponsored, monopolistic Eastern Orthodoxy gave way to a top-down, Marxist, state-sponsored atheism.”<sup>164</sup> Similarly, secularization in Canada, Noll observed, “has worked through the communal, top-down structures of traditional Canadian society.”<sup>165</sup> There is a close parallel between this particular national history and Taylor’s “Reform Master Narrative” with its focus on the secularizing effects of “élite-imposed Reform,” and the disruption of local community by modernization.<sup>166</sup> In an effort to explain the different religious pathways into modernity taken by European countries and the United States of America, Taylor suggested that “[t]he capacity of élites to set the tone of a whole society, to define its ‘religious imaginary’, may turn out to be a very important factor.”<sup>167</sup> This Gramscian theme was also quite clearly an important factor in the

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<sup>162</sup> Anthony Crézégut, “An Imaginary Gramscianism? Early French Gramscianism and the Quest for ‘Marxist Humanism’ (1947–65),” in *Revisiting Gramsci’s Notebooks* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 433–434. See also, Charles A. Micaud, “The ‘New Left’ in France,” *World Politics*, vol. 10, no. 4 (1958): 537–59.

<sup>163</sup> Noll, “What Happened to Christian Canada?” 271–273; David Martin, *A General History of Secularization* (New York: Harper Row, 1978); David Martin, “Canada in Comparative Perspective,” in *Rethinking Church, State, and Modernity: Canada Between Europe and America*, 23–33, eds. David A. Lyon and Marguerite Van Die (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

<sup>164</sup> Noll, “What Happened to Christian Canada?” 272.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 273. Emphasis original.

<sup>166</sup> ASA, 443.

<sup>167</sup> ASA, 525. For Taylor’s assessment of “the ‘American exception’—or, if one likes, seen from a broader perspective, the ‘European exception’.” See ASA, 522–530. For a contrasting reading of the American situation

Canadian case. Taylor illustrated his point regarding the American exception by highlighting the different degrees of influence exerted on popular culture in Europe and the U.S. by secular academics:

The American academic world is probably as deeply invested in unbelief as its European counterpart. Certainly, the basic assumptions in, say, social science and history, seem to be equally secularist. But in the American case, this seems without effect on large segments of the greater society, whereas in European countries, the élite outlook seems to have defined the generally accepted picture of the place of religion.<sup>168</sup>

If Taylor's assessment is correct, that an element of the American exception consisted in the limited capacity of intellectual elites to effect changes in popular religious belief and practice, and as it seems the Canadian attitude towards elites mirrored the European attitude rather than the American, then this accords with Noll's assessment of the "puzzle" that Canada, despite exceptionally high levels of religious belief and practice as late as the 1960s, "now appears in its religious character to resemble Europe much more closely than it does the United States."<sup>169</sup> Additionally, Steve Bruce's writing on America's anomalous religious trajectory emphasised "the ability of US sectarians to construct their own world."<sup>170</sup> This was not a luxury easily afforded within Québec. Bruce explained how American political structures have enabled religious conservatives to insulate themselves from the spiritually corrosive effects of secular modernity: "Diversity, if it produces a pluralistic structure for public administration and government, allows people considerable freedom to *avoid* diversity."<sup>171</sup> By contrast, when the communal structure of Québec society was reformed top-down in the "Quiet Revolution" through the political changes implemented by Premier Jean Lesage (1912–1980) between 1960 and 1966, the social structures were not favourable

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see, Steve Bruce, "Unexceptional America," in *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory*, 157–176 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>168</sup> ASA, 525.

<sup>169</sup> Noll, "What Happened to Christian Canada?" 273.

<sup>170</sup> Bruce, *Secularization*, 174.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

for religious conservatives to form an autonomous counterculture within Québec.<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, through the Catholic Action Movement, the Catholic Church itself played an integral role in the liberalization of Québec society. Michael Gauvreau has argued persuasively for this interpretation against both the “orthodox liberal” and “revisionist” histories of the Quiet Revolution in his book *The Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution, 1931–1970* (2005): “The Quiet Revolution began” Gauvreau argued, “with the importation of a variety of Catholic Action movements into Quebec in the 1930s.”<sup>173</sup> Indeed, as he wrote in an earlier article, “this reformist current within the church itself must be considered one of the principal reasons why significant numbers of Quebec Catholics embraced collectivist interpretations of human society and modern economic organization.”<sup>174</sup> Taylor himself has acknowledged the liberalizing effect of the Catholic Action Movement in Québec. “It’s ironic, actually: resistance against the liberalism that was persecuting the church gave rise, in the heart of Catholicism, to a new form of organization...a more liberal one! We experienced something similar in Quebec: the Quiet Revolution was initiated by people from Catholic Action!”<sup>175</sup> And Gauvreau noted that Taylor was an agent in the Quiet Revolution in the early 1960s.<sup>176</sup> The Catholic Action Movement that had laid the groundwork for the Quiet Revolution had concentrated its efforts on connecting with young people—a precedent Trudeau and the Cité libristes were to

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<sup>172</sup> Michael Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution, 1931–1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005). See also, José E. Igartua, “The Sixties in Quebec,” in *Debating Dissent: Canada and the 1960s*, 249–268, eds., Lara A. Campbell, Dominique Clement, and Gregory S. Kealy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), esp. 258.

<sup>173</sup> Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution, 1931–1970*, 353.

<sup>174</sup> Michael Gauvreau, “From Rechristianization to Contestation: Catholic Values and Quebec Society, 1931–1970,” *Church History*, vol. 69, no. 4 (2000): 803–833, 806.

<sup>175</sup> Taylor and Guilbault, *Avenues of Faith*, 87.

<sup>176</sup> Gauvreau, *The Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution, 1931–1970*, 248fn4, 455: “Charles Taylor, a member of the secularist Mouvement Laïque de Langue Française, recognized in 1963, two cultural currents were converging in modern Quebec: ‘the evolution of the modern State in the direction of religious neutrality; the other the evolution of the Catholic Church ... towards a spiritualization that will free it from the will to power that has weighed for centuries upon its history.’” Citing Charles Taylor, “L’État et la laïcité,” *Cité Libre*, vol. 14 (1963): 3–6, 3.

follow—and articulating a religious vision that might appeal to their modern sensibilities in an effort to mitigate encroaching secularism; Taylor was one of these young people based at McGill in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The kind of modernist theology that the Catholic Action Movement espoused to the Quebecois youth is exemplified in the writing of the Canadian priest, Maurice Lafond (1915–1998), who led the Catholic student movement/*Jeunesse étudiante catholique* (JÉC) in Québec from 1941 to 1954. Lafond’s theology, “informed his readers that Christ did not come to save souls; rather, his mission on earth was to attack unjust institutions and social customs.”<sup>177</sup> Departing from traditional soteriological concerns, Lafond reworked Christian mission as an endeavour in left-wing institutional reform:

In today’s society...institutions are too often a permanent occasion of sin and evasion of the divine. We must seize hold of these institutions. Through them we can prepare the Christian social climate that, with the aid of God’s grace, will assure the reign of virtue.<sup>178</sup>

In this way Lafond called to a generation of left-leaning Catholic students and gave a theological gloss to what Lin Chun described as “[t]he unifying focus of culturalist Marxism” namely, “to forge the intellectual preconditions for winning the majority of the people over to the socialist side in the west.”<sup>179</sup> This Gramscian approach was forceful in Québec where a handful of elite-controlled cultural channels exerted definitive influence on the traditional, communal society.

The larger hermeneutical point remains to be made. Noll concluded his examination of Canadian secularization by glossing these developments with a theological critique: “In

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<sup>177</sup> Gauvreau, “From Rechristianization to Contestation,” 815. This Catholic Left critique of “unjust institutions and social customs” has been reiterated by another Canadian priest, Ivan Illich (1926–2002), and repeated by Taylor in *A Secular Age*. See Ivan Illich, David Cayley, and Charles Taylor, *Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich as Told to David Cayley* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2005); and ASA, 737–743.

<sup>178</sup> Gauvreau, “From Rechristianization to Contestation,” 815, citing Maurice Lafond, CSC, “À base de christianisme social,” *Cahiers d’Action catholique*, Numéro special sur les Services, Montréal, December 1943.

<sup>179</sup> Lin Chun, *The British New Left* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 113.

a word, the personalism of Social Catholicism had captured, but could not feed, the soul of Quebec.”<sup>180</sup> Noll, Martin, Clarke, and others have called for a Christian hermeneutics of secularization.<sup>181</sup> Such a hermeneutic applied to the Canadian case, in an assessment of the spiritually degenerative effects of heterodox teaching, might draw on Christ’s observation, “if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.” (Matt. 15:14) Or, with reference to religious corruption and hypocrisy in an established orthodox regime, Jesus’s threat to the church in Ephesus: “If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.” (Rev. 2:5) The Lord’s exhortations from the Sermon on the Mount prove instructive, given the work of the Canadian Fabians:

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. (Matt. 7:15–20)

The fruit of the Canadian Social Gospel and the Catholic Action Movement in effecting “internal secularization”—the phenomenon of churches generating activity but preaching or working primarily for this-worldly ends—as delineated by Bryan Wilson (1926–2004), means these theological innovations can be interpreted critically in accordance with both a causal reading of the long-term secularizing effects of their teaching, and a *prima facie* reading of the Fabian Society logo.<sup>182</sup> At the widely attended Theological Genealogies of Modernity conference convened by the University of Oxford in 2021, the point was made that for theological interpretations of modernity, “[t]he best strategy...is to select insights

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<sup>180</sup> Noll, “What Happened to Christian Canada?” 264.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 273; Martin, “Canada in Comparative Perspective,” in *Rethinking Church, State, and Modernity*, 33; Clarke, “Secularization and Modernization,” 192.

<sup>182</sup> Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: Fifty Years On*, ed. Steve Bruce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

from a plurality of approaches that perpetually vie with each other.”<sup>183</sup> However, this leaves a crucial hermeneutical problem unresolved: according to what values should genealogists “select insights” and is that task separable from committing to an articulation of one vying approach? It is banal to state that assessments of “insight” are based on values, and that these values structure narratives of progress and decline. To develop this point substantively for theological genealogists: is denying the Deity of Christ indicative of progress or decline? An orthodox Christian will read this denial as apostasy, and therefore read these developments within a narrative framework of decline. An unsettling but theologically coherent assessment of much late nineteenth and twentieth century ecclesiastical history in the West is that many Christian churches failed to “hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught,” (Tit. 1:9) and have been cut off from the vine in judgement (Jn. 15:1–8).

Taylor was influenced by the Canadian Social Gospel through the SCM and by the French Catholic Left or Catholic Action Movement through *Cité Libre*, but there were two noteworthy members of McGill University Faculty who also mediated these influences. He studied comparative religion with Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916–2000), who had a background in the Canadian Social Gospel and was a former President of the Canadian the SCM. Indeed, Taylor told Robert Meynell that Smith, “really opened my mind in a new direction.”<sup>184</sup> He also emphasised Smith’s influence in a conversation with José Casanova in 2020.

Casanova: What inspired you to study religion?

Taylor: Very big question. Well, I mean...I’ll break the question down into two. What inspired me to begin to think about the Christian Catholic faith and that’s really very simple, that I was brought up in this extremely narrow authoritarian church (laughs) and I couldn’t, I just couldn’t see the point in any of this and I, but I had a set of questions and so I wanted to ask myself how to articulate

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<sup>183</sup> Darren Sarisky, “Theological Genealogies of Modernity: An Introduction,” *Modern Theology*, vol. 39, no. 4 (2023): 575–587, 576.

<sup>184</sup> Meynell, *Canadian Idealism and the Philosophy of Freedom*, 164.

it. And then the next part of the question is how I got interested in something beyond my faith and that's because I had the great luck to have a magnificent teacher as an undergraduate, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who later became famous as a student of Islam (set up the Islamic Institute), and he gave a course on comparative religion, which was absolutely riveting in which he made these different faiths comprehensible to us young undergraduates in the 1950s, 40s and 50s, in Montreal and I was carried away by that, I've never come back (laughs) from that kind of interest in ecumenism and understanding the other.<sup>185</sup>

Seventy years had elapsed from when Taylor sat in Smith's comparative religion class, and when he offered this reflection at the Berkley Center for Peace, Religion, and World Affairs. Smith had arrived to teach at McGill in 1948, after completing his PhD at Princeton. He published several works during Taylor's undergraduate years, and there is evidence in the archive of his papers at the California State University Library that he maintained an interest in Taylor's career.<sup>186</sup> In his landmark work, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1963), Smith articulated concerns that have been fixtures of Taylor's scholarship. "The two most fundamental questions confronting twentieth-century man," were, according to Smith, "one social, the other personal, both involve religion: how to turn our nascent world society into a world community, on a group level; and on a personal level, how to find meaning in modern life."<sup>187</sup> Smith's concern for the role of religion in the establishment of a "world community," was parallel with the Axial Theory of World Religions developed by the

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<sup>185</sup> Charles Taylor and José Casanova, "Global Religious and Secular Dynamics," *Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs*, 12 June 2020, accessed 12 June 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMe\\_Vf2D7ww](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RMe_Vf2D7ww).

<sup>186</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Hyderabad: Muslim Tragedy," *Middle East Journal*, vol. 4 (1950): 27–51; Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The Comparative Study of Religion: Reflections on the Possibility and Purpose of a Religious Science," McGill University, Faculty of Divinity Inaugural Lectures, 39–60 (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1950); Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Islam Confronted by Western Secularism: (A) Revolutionary Reaction," in *Islam in the Modern World*, ed. Dorothea Seelye Franck, 19–30 (Washington: Middle East Institute, 1951); Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Modern Turkey—Islamic Reformation?" *Islamic Culture*, vol. 25, no. 1 (1952): 155–186. The archive of Smith's papers includes cuttings of Charles Taylor, "Our Therapeutic Age: Today's therapeutic mindset is an outgrowth of Christianity's emphasis on the human," *Compass: A Jesuit Journal*, vol. 8, no. 5 (1990): 6–9, WCS, Box 31, Folder 34; and Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," in *Understanding and Social Enquiry*, eds. Fred Dallmayr and Thomas McCarthy (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 101–131, WCS, Box 31, Folder 35.

<sup>187</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1964), 8.

Swiss-German psychologist and philosopher, Karl Jaspers (1883–1969), in his book written after the Second World War, *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte/The Origin and Goal of History* (1949; trans. 1953).<sup>188</sup> This burgeoning sense of globalization permeates Taylor’s modern socialist political theory; as he told the Slant Symposium in 1967, “the root of the socialist case, that the result of technological society is to create a single global environment that can only be tackled as a whole, is so obtrusive a fact that it cannot help but force itself onto liberal consciousness.”<sup>189</sup> Smith’s global outlook made him an important critic of the secularization thesis, and he voiced a line of argument that echoes in Taylor’s work:

[R]eligion itself continues, and in many parts of the world appears perhaps to be resurgent. For a time some thought that the onslaught of science, comparative religion, uncertainty, and the rest—in a word, the onslaught of modernity—meant or would mean the gradual decline or disappearance of religious tradition. This no longer seems obvious.... despite all ‘debunking’, men find in religion something outweighing the critics charges.<sup>190</sup>

Similarly, *A Secular Age* stated: “the dominant secularization narrative...will become less plausible over time. This will happen in part because it will be clear that other societies are not following suit, and thus that this master narrative isn’t about universal humanity; and also because many of the ills for which ‘religion’ was supposedly responsible aren’t going away.”<sup>191</sup> This desire to write a modern political and religious Master Narrative for “universal humanity” was common to Taylor, Smith, and Jaspers. Taylor’s reception of the Kyoto Prize for developing a social philosophy to pursue the coexistence of diverse cultures was in close affinity with Smith’s pluralist religious project. For Smith conceded that “[c]oexistence, if not a final truth of man’s diversity, would seem at least an immediate necessity and, indeed, an immediate virtue.”<sup>192</sup> Liberal coexistence was not the “final truth

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 122–123, 301fn1; Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953).

<sup>189</sup> Taylor, “From Marxism to the Dialogue Society,” in *From Culture to Revolution*, 168.

<sup>190</sup> Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 3.

<sup>191</sup> ASA, 770.

<sup>192</sup> Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 10.

of man's diversity," and the implied communitarian hope on Smith's imaginative horizon, inched closer in Taylor's work, was of collaborative and diverse engagement with the transcendent as it is reflected across religious traditions and human experiences.

The other notable academic appointment at McGill University in 1948 was Tadeusz Romer, as Professor of French Language and Culture. Romer had been born into an aristocratic Polish family, and after studying Law and Politics in Switzerland, he embarked on a career in the Polish diplomatic services, which included assignments in Paris, Warsaw, Lisbon, Rome, Shanghai, and Moscow; he was the Polish ambassador to the USSR and Japan during the Second World War and has been studied for his work supporting Jewish refugees in East Asia.<sup>193</sup> After the Second World War, Romer and his family migrated to Canada, and he took up his teaching position at McGill. He was involved with the Polish Catholic Action Movement, and from 1963 until his death in 1978 Romer was President of the Polish Institute of Science in Canada. When Romer's obituary was published in *The New York Times*, it recorded that he was "survived by his wife, Zofia, and three daughters, Mrs. Renia Nitolski, Ita Straszak and Alba Taylor."<sup>194</sup> His daughter Alba had been born in 1931, the same year as Charles Taylor, and although they married in 1956, it seems reasonable to presume they met in Canada in the late 1940s, or early 1950s. In any case, they were well matched: they were both progressive Catholics from aristocratic backgrounds. When Palma spoke with Taylor about his first wife during their serendipitous meeting in a hotel lobby at a conference, Taylor's conversation centred on "what a

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<sup>193</sup> Ewa Pałasz-Rutkowska, "The Polish Ambassador Tadeusz Romer – A Rescuer of Refugees in Tokyo," *Darbai Ir Dienos*, vol. 67 (2017): 239–54, esp. 245–246; Akira Kitade, "Tadeusz Romer, Polish Ambassador to Japan," in *Emerging Heroes: WWII-Era Diplomats, Jewish Refugees, and Escape to Japan*, 116–123, ed. Donna Ratajczak and trans. Kuniko Katz (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2022).

<sup>194</sup> "Tadeusz Romer, 83, Envoy of Poland in the 1930's," *The New York Times*, 28 March 1978, 40. See also, "Tadeusz Romer: International Conference, 21–22 October 2018" McGill University, Montreal, Canada, accessed 4 July 2023, <https://romer.conference.mcgill.ca/programe.html>.

distinguished family she came from.”<sup>195</sup> Taylor’s family, and his wife’s family, were both at home in the upper echelons of the Canadian Catholic elite.

The scale of this privilege is exhibited in the collection of Senator Louis-Phillippe Beaubien’s papers at the Library and Archives Canada (LAC), which contains an unexamined and illuminating file titled: “Correspondance avec Charles M. Taylor (1955–1961)”.<sup>196</sup> Taylor’s uncle, Louis-Phillippe Beaubien, was a stockbroker who helped him manage his finances during his time studying in England and Paris. This archival source contains over fifty letters and receipts related to Beaubien’s management of Taylor’s estate.<sup>197</sup> It supplies unparalleled contextual insight into Taylor’s background that is especially significant for readings of *A Secular Age* given its focus on elite imposed Reform. One illustrative episode discussed in these items of correspondence concerned the poor handling of Alba Taylor’s money by a branch of Barclays Bank in Kensington, London. The fact that the Taylor’s lived in London and banked in Kensington is itself noteworthy. Much of Taylor’s correspondence is addressed from either All Souls College or 23 Lansdowne Road, W.11. This latter address is for a Notting Hill townhouse beside Hanover Gardens, twenty-minutes’ walk from Kensington Palace and Hyde Park; sold for £12,850,000 in June 2007.<sup>198</sup> The Taylor’s lived there from 1958 to 1960 and Taylor organized for Beaubien to pay their rent directly to Maria Kullmann (1902–1965) for tax purposes.<sup>199</sup> Kullmann was

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<sup>195</sup> Palma, “Recognition of Diversity,” 14.

<sup>196</sup> Louis-Phillippe Beaubien, “Correspondance avec Charles M. Taylor (1955–1961),” Honorable Louis Beaubien Et Famille Fonds, MG 27, I E 35, Vol. 4, Dossier 3, Library and Archives Canada.

<sup>197</sup> Several items are dated later than 1961, including correspondence from Taylor in 1970.

<sup>198</sup> HM Land Registry, “Transaction Record: 23 Lansdowne Road, London, W11 3AG,” accessed 15 July 2023, <https://landregistry.data.gov.uk/data/ppi/transaction/52C55F91-72D8-479E-B15C-E8BC4B1D0992/current>.

<sup>199</sup> “My dear Louis, Thanks very much for the £50 you sent to Alba’s account. I’m sorry to keep chopping and changing like this but it just occurred to me that I’ve been a bloody fool these last months. The problem is that the remittances from Canada to Alba’s account fall under income tax and if the total of my stipend and these remittances gets to £2000, the rate goes up quite steeply. One of the biggest items in our budget is rent and board here, and there’s no reason why this should pass through Alba’s account at all, Could you send the amount directly? This would involve sending a sum of £83.105.0 (eighty-three pounds, five shillings) per month to the account of: Mrs Maria Kullmann, Account no. 2., National Bank, Ltd., Notting Hill Gate Branch.” Taylor to Beaubien, 22 November 1959, Beaubien MSS.

both their landlady and the founder of Pushkin House—a centre for Russian culture in London, frequented by Isaiah Berlin and others, five-minutes' walk from where the Taylor's lived. Pushkin House was a vibrant social hub for Eastern European émigrés in the aftermath of the Second World War; even when the Taylor's moved to 74 Elgin Crescent, W.11 in September 1960, they were still only a few minutes' walk from its premises.<sup>200</sup> The attraction to this social centre presumably came through the Romer side of the Taylor household. And in this affluent part of London they began raising their young family: three of their five daughters, Karen (b. 1958), Miriam (b. 1959), and Wanda (b. 1960), were born in the UK; while a further two children, Gabriela (b. 1962) and Gretta (b. 1965), were born after they returned to Canada.<sup>201</sup> In many of the letters, Beaubien and Taylor discussed arrangements for money to be transferred from Taylor's Canadian funds over to Alba's London bank account. In a letter dated 25 October 1958, the manager at Barclays Bank in Kensington confirmed to Beaubien that \$500 had been transferred to Alba Taylor's account.<sup>202</sup> However, in a later item of correspondence dated 12 November 1958, the Bank of Montreal wrote to Beaubien to blame Barclays for a delay in Alba's payment, saying that "there is no doubt that Mrs. Taylor has been inconvenienced unnecessarily."<sup>203</sup> The next day, 13 November 1958, Beaubien wrote to Taylor explaining that he would raise the matter with Anthony W. Tuke (1897–1975): "I feel terribly badly about poor Alba's \$500...I kicked up a certain amount of fuss with the Bank of Montreal and am now writing to Mr. Anthony William Tuke, President of Barclay's Bank. I think Alba will get service from now on."<sup>204</sup> A. W. "Iron" Tuke, of the Tuke mercantile dynasty, was chairman of Barclays Bank from 1951 to

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<sup>200</sup> Taylor to Beaubien, 18 June 1960, Beaubien MSS. Pushkin House was originally located at 24 Kensington Park Gardens (1954–1956) and then 46 Ladbroke Grove (1956–2006).

<sup>201</sup> Taylor dedicated *A Secular Age* to Gretta, who shared the name with his sister.

<sup>202</sup> Barclays Manager to Beaubien, 25 October 1958, Beaubien MSS.

<sup>203</sup> C.R.M. Allan to Beaubien, 12 November 1958, Beaubien MSS.

<sup>204</sup> Beaubien to Taylor, 13 November 1958, Beaubien MSS.

1962.<sup>205</sup> The fact that Beaubien was able to complain directly to the chairman of Barclays speaks volumes regarding the status of the Beaubien, Romer, and Taylor families (and Beaubien wrote to leading financiers to help Taylor on several occasions). Taylor replied to Beaubien on 18 November 1958, and his patrician response was not exactly loyal to proletarian hopes for equality: “Thanks very much for your letter and for chivvying Barclay’s Bank. Alba noticed last time she was there that there was much more bowing and seraping, [sic] so its [sic] already taken effect.”<sup>206</sup> In the rest of this letter Taylor requested another £350 for Alba’s account and organized for quarterly payments of £300 to be made into her account at the Kensington branch.<sup>207</sup> Beaubien confirmed that he would act on these plans in a letter dated 24 November 1958, but he suggested, “I think it is better not to trust the bank too much in case Alba needed the money in a hurry. I have arranged to have a draft for £100 mailed to Alba’s bank on the seventh of each month. The first one to go two weeks from today.”<sup>208</sup>

The record of Beaubien’s financial assistance began on 18 March 1955, when Taylor was approaching his finals at Balliol, after he had been living in England for almost three years. Presumably Taylor had inherited shares of his father’s estate in 1953. “Dear Chuck” Beaubien wrote,

Geoff asked the Royal Trust Co. to send the revenue you receive from Walgrave to me here at L.G. Beaubien & Co. so that I can invest it for you. The Royal Trust, however, to keep their records straight, would like to get your written authorization before they send me the money. I am enclosing, therefore, the sort of letter they want along with an addressed envelope which you might be good enough to sign, stamp and mail, unless you have other plans for your loose cash.

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<sup>205</sup> Margaret Ackrill, “Tuke, Anthony William (1897–1975), banker,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004, accessed 20 July 2023, <https://www-oxforddnb-com.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-47864>.

<sup>206</sup> Taylor to Beaubien, 18 November 1958, Beaubien MSS.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> Beaubien to Taylor, 24 November 1958, Beaubien MSS.

Now that we are talking of cash, Geoff tells me that you live entirely on your scholarship. Personally, I don't see how you do it. Wouldn't you like me to send you a little money each month. I am so afraid you will ruin your health, eating as you must at the worst joints. After all you could, if you wanted to, live in comparative comfort.

All the family send their love, [then in handwriting] and kindest regards. Do come home soon even if it is only for a short trip.

Yours,  
Louis.<sup>209</sup>

Beaubien's good humour and familial warmth radiate from the letter. It seems that he wrote to Taylor in March so that these affairs could be put in order with the Royal Trust Company before the start of the next tax year; indeed, Taylor and Beaubien corresponded regularly regarding tax and concerning the expertise of the Royal Trust Company. On 28 April 1958, Taylor contacted his uncle asking for advice regarding income tax in England and Canada. "Dear Louis" he wrote,

I am being pressured by the income tax people ~~here~~ to reveal my income in Canada. I'm pretty sure I'm not going to be liable to double taxation (I'm going to check on this in Canada House) but they want it for the autumn in any case. After a year of stalling, I've decided to comply. Would you be able to tell me a) my total income from Walgrave + the money I have with you for the year ending April 5 1957 b) the same figure for the year ending April 5 1958? I hope this is not too much of a find.<sup>210</sup>

The letter ended with comments on the busyness of term time and the Taylor's anticipation for a trip home in June. Beaubien responded on 13 May 1958 encouraging Taylor to re-think his strategy beyond "a year of stalling" and some counsel from Canada House; he called upon his financial contacts once again.

Dear Chuck:

I have your letter of the 29<sup>th</sup> of April and it strikes me that you ought to get some pretty good advice on this question of English Income Tax and, by that, I do not mean Canada House. I have spoken to Bill Rorke at the Royal Trust and he is writing today to Mr. J.J. Thew,

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<sup>209</sup> Beaubien to Taylor, 18 March 1955, Beaubien MSS.

<sup>210</sup> Taylor to Beaubien, 28 April 1958, Beaubien MSS.

who is the income tax expert at the London office of the Royal Trust Co. He will tell Mr. Thew that you are a resident of Canada domiciled here in tax purposes, etc., etc., but living in England. I would suggest that you go and see Mr. Thew as soon as possible and do not do anything until you have had a chat with him. If he decides that you should give the English taxation authorities the figures on your Canadian income for the last two years, he can write to Bill Rorke and get a copy of your Federal Income Tax return for those years.<sup>211</sup>

Beaubien's advice to Taylor was well received, and Taylor appreciated the Royal Trust Company's work in putting up "a good fight" against Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. He communicated this to Beaubien on 26 November 1960:

I have finally been hit for my back income tax in this country. The Royal Trust people have been handling it and seem to have put up a good fight. The bill, indicating their fee, comes to £497.5.7. Would you please send this amount to the Royal Trust of Canada branch in London... They will take it from there. It's quite a bit, but that's what taxes are like in this country.<sup>212</sup>

Given "what taxes are like in this country" the wealthy founder-editor of the *New Left Review* was looking forward to getting home by the end of 1960. He wrote to Beaubien again in March 1961 to address this matter for a final time: "internal revenue have put the grab on me again. This time for the year 1959/60. Would you please send £472.2.6. to the Royal Trust Company of Canada."<sup>213</sup> This history is important because it contextualizes the proposals of a left-wing politician who stated: "we should exploit the obvious places where even on liberal grounds private property needs to be overruled by collective control.... they can constitute a powerful lever of progress towards a socialist vision."<sup>214</sup> Indeed, Taylor was an NDP electoral candidate who believed, "[t]he great obstacle to action in these areas is private property, including not only large interests, but also the investment ordinary people have in the privatisation of their lives."<sup>215</sup> The epithetical trope "champagne socialist",

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<sup>211</sup> Beaubien to Taylor, 13 May 1958, Beaubien MSS.

<sup>212</sup> Taylor to Beaubien, 26 November 1960, Beaubien MSS.

<sup>213</sup> Taylor to Beaubien, 9 March 1961, Beaubien MSS.

<sup>214</sup> Taylor, "From Marxism to the Dialogue Society," in *From Culture to Revolution*, 180.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

however tired, seemingly exists for a reason, and Taylor's philosopher-king disposition towards "ordinary people" makes sense against the backdrop of his wealth.

On 20 June 1955, however, Beaubien had written to a younger Taylor helping him to prepare for his study abroad in Paris, and reiterating encouragement for his wealthy nephew to live more salubriously.

Dear Chuck:

Your mother told me to send you \$100, so I am enclosing a draft for that amount. You might keep in mind the fact that I can send you money any time you need it. All you have to do is send a cable "collect" to "BEAUBRAN [*sic*] MONTREAL". That is all the address that is required and just say send me \$100 or whatever you want, and sign it Charles M. Taylor. If you do not give me a return address, I will air mail it to Oxford. In Paris, of course, you can just go and see Charles Herdt, at Banque Beaubien, 1 rue Richepance, Paris 8e. The telephone No. is Opera 9062. I will ask Andrew to write to Herdt so that he will know all about you.

Now your stocks have done well, you are quite comfortably off, so for heaven's sake do not ruin your health by eating at all the third rate dumps. You could easily spend another couple of hundred dollars a month without becoming a spend thrift.

Kindest regards and much love from Banty, Margot and Charles.

Yours ever,  
Louis.<sup>216</sup>

Once again, the family's network of financial contacts was drawn upon: on 14 July 1955, the General Secretary of L.G. Beaubien & Co. wrote to Henri Fauchier-Magnan (1910–1986), Deputy General Director at Banque Beaubien, to relay Louis-Philippe's instructions:

Monsieur Louis-Philippe Beaubien, son of the late Senator Beaubien...has asked us to recommend to your good attention his nephew, Monsieur Charles M. Taylor, who is due to go to Paris at the beginning of the fall for a study period of approximately one year. He is a young man who enjoys a large fortune and if he happens to contact you to obtain funds, you can advance him, without referring to us, all the amounts he may need up to the sum of \$5,000. It is very unlikely but if it happens that his needs exceed this sum,

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<sup>216</sup> Beaubien to Taylor, 20 June 1955, Beaubien MSS.

you will only have to ask us by cable to confirm the amount of the payment that you will have to make to him.<sup>217</sup>

Although Taylor was a “young man who enjoys a large fortune” attending Merleau-Ponty’s seminars and settling into life on the *Rive Gauche*, 1956 proved a tumultuous year for Leftist movements internationally.

In 1956, three devastating occurrences befell British Socialism. First, on 25 February, Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971) addressed the delegates of the twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in his so-called “Secret Speech”. Three years after Stalin’s death, Khrushchev revealed that Soviet Communism had degenerated into tyranny. He exposed Stalin’s authoritarianism: the betrayal, torture, and murder of committed Communists.<sup>218</sup> It was apocalyptic for the Communist Party. A third of the Party’s members in Britain resigned in 1956 and more resigned the next year as well.<sup>219</sup> For the “Secret Speech” did not remain secret for long, and its contents were leaked to the West, which some have suggested Khrushchev organised himself to foster support for his de-Stalinization campaigns.<sup>220</sup> As the tremors of this shock rippled out, they energized a revolt at the University of Budapest when twelve students began calling for free elections and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. By the end of October this movement had grown into a national uprising politically aligned with anti-Communist forces in Poland and posing a threat to Soviet occupation. Khrushchev sent the Red Army into Budapest to suppress the

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<sup>217</sup> L. Boucher to Henri Fauchier-Magnan, 14 July 1955, Beaubien MSS: “Monsieur Louis-Philippe Beaubien, fils de feu le sénateur Beaubien...nous a priés de recommander à votre bonne attention son neveu, Monsieur Charles M. Taylor, qui doit se rendre à Paris au début de l'automne pour séjour d'études d'environ un an. C'est un jeune homme qui jouit d'une fortune important et s'il lui arrivait de s'adresser à vous pour obtenir des fonds, vous pourrez lui avancer, sans en référer à nous, tous les montants dont il pourrait avoir besoin jusqu'à concurrence d'une somme de \$5,000. La chose est très peu probable mais s'il arrivait que ses besoins dépasseraient cette somme, vous n'aurez qu'à nous demander par câble de vous confirmer le montant du paiement que vous aurez à lui faire.”

<sup>218</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, *The Crimes of the Stalin Era: Special Report to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: New Leader, 1956).

<sup>219</sup> Chun, *The British New Left*, 3–4.

<sup>220</sup> John Rettie, “How Khrushchev Leaked his Secret Speech to the World,” *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 62, no. 1 (2006): 187–193.

revolution. As thousands fled the country, Taylor travelled to Vienna to help establish a field office supporting student refugees and helping them to find transport out of eastern Europe.<sup>221</sup> This decision was not motivated by a personal altruism detached from his intellectual endeavours; the moral impulses behind this act reverberate through Taylor's writings on humanism and his philosophical anthropology. When he returned to Oxford in 1957, Taylor's mind focused on re-thinking socialist theory by addressing the philosophical pathologies he perceived in Marxist Communism that were manifested in Soviet oppression. However, alongside the "Secret Speech" and the Hungarian Revolution, there was a third trauma inflicted on the British Left in 1956, and that was the Suez Crisis. This was a different kind of frustration for the socialist movement because unlike the first two which undermined the integrity of the Communist Party, the Suez Crisis exhibited the moral failure of the Labour Party. The Suez Canal in Egypt had been built in 1869 by a French colonial diplomat as a vital trading route; by the mid-twentieth century, it was owned by British and French shareholders as a legacy from colonization. In July 1956, the Egyptian President Gamal Nasser (1918–1970) nationalised the canal in accordance with his anti-imperial and socialist policy agenda. European shareholders were disturbed to lose this asset: the British, French, and Israeli governments decided to invade Egypt and reclaim the canal. But the United States and the United Nations condemned the invasion leaving the British, French, and Israelis with no choice but to withdraw. Labour politicians, however, had either supported the invasion or opposed it on the grounds that it damaged Britain's relationship with America. To socialists in Britain this signalled that Labour's reformist approach—seeking the slow and steady advancement of welfare state capitalism—was ultimately beholden to corporate interests and complicit in imperialism.

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<sup>221</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Emigration," *Universities and Left Review*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1957): 75–76, 75: "from November 1956 to April 1957 Charles Taylor was World University Service representative with Hungarian student refugees in Austria."

In the aftermath of the disappointment and disillusion of 1956, the British New Left was born. As a movement, it emerged from pre-existing networks as they sought to recalibrate in the wake of these crises. Discussing this period in a 2021 interview, Taylor was asked: “When do you think the New Left became capital initials the New Left?”

Charles Taylor: Oh, I think very very soon. I mean the premise of the whole thing was that the vehicles everyone had been counting on, namely the Communist Party and in a much less severe way the Labour Party, were not adequate, right. So we were going to be (laughs)—there was tremendous chutzpah—we were going to be the creators of a theory of a new left...A new definition of what a left movement should be, socialist movement should be, in our time.<sup>222</sup>

This pioneering group of New Leftists included Stuart Hall, Raphael Samuel (1934–1996), and Gabriel Pearson (d. 2021). All of whom were studying together at Oxford, where Taylor, Samuel, and Pearson had overlapped at Balliol. Hall went on to establish the field of British Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, Samuel taught at Ruskin College and founded the influential History Workshop, and Pearson became Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Essex. Together they founded the student-led journal, the *Universities and Left Review* in 1957, which in Andrew Whitehead’s words, was “the founding expression of the New Left”.<sup>223</sup> As a group of editors, they were young, energetic, and talented; and the *ULR* was their literary outlet while they sought to build a New Left movement through public meetings and events at their London club. Their intellectual agenda to create a new theory of the Left ran parallel to the conversation developing among an older generation of disaffected Communists in the *New Reasoner: A Journal of Socialist Humanism* between 1957 and 1959. These two journals were quite different, but there was an arresting engagement between them. The *New Reasoner* was edited from the North of England; its editors, E. P. Thompson (1924–1993) and John Saville (1916–2009) were in their thirties

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<sup>222</sup> Whitehead and Taylor, “The New Left.”

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

and forties respectively, both had been under MI5 surveillance for years given their longstanding memberships of the Communist Party, and they maintained close links with the working class.<sup>224</sup> Whereas the *ULR* was produced from Oxford and London, its editorial board had an average age of 24, and half the board were international students.<sup>225</sup> The path to a merger was conceivable but not obvious, and the debate that played out between Thompson and Taylor in the pages of these journals from 1957 to 1958 regarding the flaws in Marxist Communism helped to lay the moral-philosophical groundwork for the New Left before the journals merged in 1960 to form the *New Left Review*.

The *New Left Review*'s opening editorial stated:

We are in our missionary phase...the New Left in general—must pioneer a way forward by working for socialism as the old missionaries worked as if consumed by a fire that is capable of lighting the darker places in our society. We have to go out into towns and cities, universities and technical colleges [and]...*make socialists* there....There is no law which says...[we can] rely upon poverty and exploitation to drive people, like blind animals, towards socialism. Socialism is and will remain, an active faith in a new society, a faith to which we turn as conscious, thinking human beings.<sup>226</sup>

This inaugural mission statement emphasized the New Left's turn away from scientific socialism with its reductive conception of human agency, and the turn towards an inspiring romantic vision of socialist evangelization that cohered with a humanist respect for personal autonomy. It avoided an objectification of the human subject that would preclude freedom and life. The statement's religious and eschatological overtones may have served as a purely immanent aesthetic for some, but it reflects a hint of openness to transcendent for others. Then nearly thirty, Charles Taylor sat on the editorial board.

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<sup>224</sup> Paul Flowers and John McIlroy, *1956: John Saville, EP Thompson & The Reasoner* (London: Merlin, 2016); Madeline Davis, "Edward Thompson, MI5 and the Reasoner controversy: negotiating 'Communist principle' in the crisis of 1956," *The Raymond Williams Society*, no. 16 (2016): 1–25.

<sup>225</sup> Sophie Scott-Brown, "An Activist Stage Craft? Performative Politics in the First British New Left (1956–1962)," *History of European Ideas*, vol. 48, no. 1 (2022): 129–143.

<sup>226</sup> Cited in Raphael Samuel, "Born-Again Socialism" in *Out of Apathy*, 52–53. Emphasis original.

When Taylor had arrived in Balliol, he had overlapped with a young Marxist history tutor who would go on to become Master of the College, Christopher Hill (1912–2003). He also met Pearson and Samuel, both of whom were members of the Communist Party—and Samuel was also a member of the Communist Party Historians Group founded by Hill. It was widely recognised by the early New Left that Samuel was the most effective activist among them. Twelve members of his family had been Communist Party organisers, and he joined the Young Communist League at age seven.<sup>227</sup> Yet, he left the Party in 1956 and drove both the founding of the *ULR* journal and the later decision to purchase a coffee shop in London as an intellectual outpost. As Hall testified, “Raphael was the central figure in the small group of young communist undergraduates, centered around Christopher Hill at Balliol”.<sup>228</sup> In the 1950s, this was Taylor’s circle of friends (or “Comrades”, as Samuel addressed them).<sup>229</sup> While Samuel was the social galvanizer who catalysed much of the group’s activity, Taylor was valued for his intellectual flair. The meeting where they voted on the London coffee shop, for example, was held in Taylor’s rooms at All Souls where they cast their votes at midnight—and Hall later stated, Taylor “was much more sophisticated philosophically than the rest of us.”<sup>230</sup>

Taylor also donated considerable sums of money to the work of both the *ULR* and the *NLR*. The record of his correspondence with Senator Beaubien indicates that he gave financially to these publications on several occasions. For example, on 6 October 1958, Taylor wrote to Beaubien asking, “Could you please make two transmissions for me: to England, one; of 1500 dollars to the Magazine. Could you send it to the Account which is under the name ‘Universities and Left Review’, Barclay’s Bank, New Bank, Cornmarket

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<sup>227</sup> Chun, *The British New Left*, 22.

<sup>228</sup> Stuart Hall, “Raphael Samuel: 1934–1996,” *New Left Review*, no. 221 (1997): 119–127, 119.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 122; Stuart Hall, “Charles Taylor in the Archives,” *Critical Arts*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2009): 374–376, 374.

St., Oxford.”<sup>231</sup> Beaubien confirmed he had carried out the instructions in a letter dated 8 October 1958.<sup>232</sup> Taylor requested for his uncle to transfer another donation to the *ULR* on 11 February 1959,

Dear Louis:

Thanks very much for all the things you did for Alba. Now there’s something else. I want to give another £1000 donation to the magazine. Could you send me a cheque for this (thousand pounds) or its dollar equivalent, but made out to “Universities and Left Review”. (Otherwise of course, I’d [*sic*] pay tax on it here-- if it were made out in my name). Thanks again.

I hear that you and Babs may be coming to Europe this month, and stopping by in England. I hope so. We look forward to seeing you when you do.

Please give my love to Babs and Margot. Thanks again.

Yours  
Chuck

P. S. Please excuse the typing. I did it ~~mys~~ myself.<sup>233</sup>

Beaubien wrote to Taylor on 16 February 1959 with a £1,000 cheque enclosed in the letter for the *Universities and Left Review*.<sup>234</sup> It must be acknowledged that there is a certain irony to a wealthy Socialist seeking to funnel money into a Leftist magazine without paying tax. Then on 20 January 1960, Beaubien confirmed that he transferred a further £500 to the *New Left Review*.<sup>235</sup> Adjusted for inflation, £3,000 of donations in 1960 would have been worth the same as £57,142 of purchasing power in May 2023.<sup>236</sup> The record of these donations illustrates Taylor’s commitment to spreading socialist thought.

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<sup>231</sup> Taylor to Beaubien, 6 October 1958, Beaubien MSS.

<sup>232</sup> Beaubien to Taylor, 8 October 1958, Beaubien MSS.

<sup>233</sup> Taylor to Beaubien, 11 February 1959, Beaubien MSS.

<sup>234</sup> Beaubien to Taylor, 16 February 1959, Beaubien MSS.

<sup>235</sup> Beaubien to Taylor, 20 January 1960, Beaubien MSS.

<sup>236</sup> Bank of England, “Inflation Calculator,” accessed 1 July 2023, <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>.

When Taylor ended his nine-year stint in Oxford and returned to Canada to teach political science in Montréal and engage directly in the party politics of his home country, the editors of the *New Left Review* published an editorial thanking him for his work:

Chuck Taylor, the other founder-editor of ULR, has now returned to Canada and has taken with him intellectual and political qualities we shall find it difficult to replace...Readers, as well as Boarders, will wish Chuck and Alba good luck, and good hunting with the new Canadian Party—Chuck will remain a corresponding member of the Board.<sup>237</sup>

Importantly the Board's good wishes extended to "Chuck and Alba". Alba Taylor had publicly participated in the New Left's formative discourse with an article on "Religion in Poland" published in the *New Reasoner*, Spring 1959.<sup>238</sup> A footnote in *Sources of the Self* supplies context for this article. In the penultimate chapter of *Sources*, "Epiphanies of Modernism", Charles thanked Alba Taylor for directing him to poetry which illustrated that "the search for a stark and austere poetry of reality deserted by the spirit can come from the need to find words for a devastated world... as one sees with certain... Polish poets... under the press of Stalinism... Finding a language for horror and destruction can be part of a fight for spiritual survival."<sup>239</sup> Given her background as a Progressive Polish Catholic from a distinguished family, and Taylor's acknowledgement that she had directed him to the poetry that had emerged from Poland amidst Stalinist oppression, it seems evident that Alba Taylor's engagement with the fallout from Marxist Communism was important.<sup>240</sup> Her decision to write an article for the *New Reasoner* considering the political and religious development of Poland in 1959—three years into the so-called Khrushchev Thaw and the de-Stalinization campaigns—reflected both her concern and hope for her home country.

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<sup>237</sup> NLR Editors, "Notes for Readers," *New Left Review*, vol. 1, no. 12 (1961): n.p.

<sup>238</sup> Alba Taylor, "Religion in Poland," *New Reasoner*, no. 8 (1959): 103–106.

<sup>239</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 484, 589fn76.

<sup>240</sup> Alba Taylor also organized the translation of *New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review* articles for Eastern European readers. See *Universities and Left Review*, no. 6 (1959): 34.

Her article explored the possibilities for Marxists and Catholics to co-operate in pursuing social justice and isolated the key points of contention in their contrasting mindsets. As her article began: “Co-existence between the Marxist and Christian ideologies is still being worked out in Poland today. In the press it is often stressed that a pluralistic culture is one of the characteristics of the Polish scene, indeed of the modern world.”<sup>241</sup> She gave a sober assessment of the situation, however. “Since October,” she wrote,

Marxists have officially denied the thesis that social conflicts must necessarily become more acute as socialism progresses. From then on discussion between them and Catholics has become possible on a theoretical level. These discussions are carried on by the progressive elements on both sides in the hope that mere passive toleration of each other might eventually turn into *a dynamic, creative co-existence*. These are all nice sounding phrases, but when examining the problems at hand one realises how much as yet these discussions remain in the world of theory.<sup>242</sup>

As the de-Stalinization campaigns created space for these discussions, Alba Taylor wrote from England to bring clarity to this dialogue between progressive Catholics and liberal Marxists by critically analysing pertinent issues in their disagreement. She engaged with a discussion contained in a Polish cultural review magazine between four interlocutors: two were Catholic, one was an atheist, and the fourth was Marxist. Alba Taylor considered the optimistic perspective advanced by a Catholic writer, who suggested: “The dialogue [between Marxists and Catholics], can first of all be understood in terms of a struggle...but...it can [also] be conceived above all as a competition...Why could it not be possible for Marxists and Catholics to compete in taking responsibility for solving our most painful and pressing social...problems.”<sup>243</sup> Alba Taylor highlighted that the choice of the word “compete” rather than “co-operate” indicated the true nature of this Catholic writer’s outlook.<sup>244</sup> She then isolated a central issue in the debate: “One of the differences between

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<sup>241</sup> Taylor, “Religion in Poland,” 103.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 103–104.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 104.

Marxists and Catholic Socialists,” she explained, “lies in their different conception of the role of the State.”<sup>245</sup> Specifically, on the Catholic side, she suggested that the State should promote social justice, be concerned with the general good of all its citizens, and “create conditions to facilitate not only a passive but an active co-existence between ideologies”.<sup>246</sup> Developing this progressive Catholic social theory has been the focus of her husband’s career.<sup>247</sup> Taylor won the Kyoto Prize for “the Construction of a Social Philosophy to Pursue the Coexistence of Diverse Cultures” and the Taylor’s had both been committed to this project. Indeed, Alba Taylor’s central political-theoretical proposal was that if socialist intellectuals can enjoy the freedom to work and write, then they can labour to cultivate a more harmonious social vision. “It is a very hopeful sign that such discussions among intellectuals are possible.” She wrote, “They bring about a better understanding and dissipate prejudices which exist on both sides.”<sup>248</sup> Therefore, the defining characteristic of Charles Taylor’s career—that he as a socialist intellectual should seek to advance a progressive Catholic political theory—was latent in an article written by his wife, as a figure in the British New Left, in 1959.

One forceful point that Taylor made in debate with E. P. Thompson exhibited a fresh philosophical influence on the British New Left. The Bolsheviks “wanted to forge a new human nature” Taylor explained, “without, or even in spite of, the spontaneous action of the masses. The result was as Edward Thompson points out, the worst kind of alienation. It was not simply rule by bureaucrats, but also rule in the name of abstractions.”<sup>249</sup> This critique of rule in the name of abstractions producing alienation echoes the writings of the young Marx, who contended that it was the abstraction of *life* that alienated humanity from itself, as

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> See Taylor, *The Patter of Politics*.

<sup>248</sup> Taylor, “Religion in Poland,” 104.

<sup>249</sup> Taylor, “Marxism and Humanism,” 94.

certain abstractions refracted humanity's contact with the world through various forms of alienating mediations.<sup>250</sup> For example, Protestant sacramental theology, which ostensibly abstracted God's grace from the eucharist, or the abstraction of communal life in social contract theory.<sup>251</sup> The ultimate abstraction that alienated humanity from life was the abstract value of money; an abstract promise attached to currency.<sup>252</sup> This more existential and phenomenological line of argument was at the heart of the New Left's critique of liberal capitalist society. As Maurice Cranston observed, "The Marxism of the New Left is based upon a new Marx. For the Marx these writers follow is not so much the economist, the later Marx, the author of *Das Kapital*, but rather Marx the sociologist, the author of the early philosophical manuscripts. Their Marx is, like themselves, a 'Hegelian' of sorts, a metaphysician, neither a positivist nor a scientific determinist. Their Marx is the philosopher of alienation."<sup>253</sup> The vivid parallels between Cranston's description of the neo-Marxism of the New Left and Taylor's thought correspond with the testimony from Hall that Taylor rediscovered Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* while studying with Merleau-Ponty in Paris and personally introduced this work by Marx to the British New Left. As Hall recorded, "of considerable importance to some of us was the rediscovery, through Chuck Taylor, of Marx's early Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, with its themes of alienation, species being and 'new needs', which he brought over from Paris in 1958 in French and which only shortly thereafter became available to us in an English translation."<sup>254</sup> And in Samuel's account, "[a] later discovery, which can be dated fairly precisely to the summer of 1957, was alienation theory and the young Marx. It gave us a

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<sup>250</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. Dirk Struik (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), 186, 188, 189, 192.

<sup>251</sup> See Christopher Hill, "Covenant Theology and the Concept of 'A Public Person'," in *Powers, Possessions, and Freedom: Essays in Honour of C. B. Macpherson*, 3–22, ed. Alkis Kontos (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 5, 22.

<sup>252</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 165–166.

<sup>253</sup> Maurice Cranston, *The New Left: Six Critical Essays* (London: Bodley Head, 1970), 7.

<sup>254</sup> Hall, "The 'First' New Left," 27–28. See also Gareth Stedman Jones on the 1844 Manuscripts in *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 172.

‘humanist’ Marx—the Marx of the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844—to counterpose to the ‘determinist’ Marx of later years. This early Marx was in some sense, so far as Britain was concerned, our very own, since the *Manuscripts* were not translated into English until 1960.”<sup>255</sup> This Marxist theme of the intellectualization and abstraction of life producing alienation has been rechristened in Taylor’s writings as “excarnation”.

Existential phenomenology was also used by the New Left to help their readers grasp this sense of alienation. As Samuel commented, “in philosophy we argued for a more phenomenological understanding of reality, contrasting the urgencies of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre with the frivolities of Oxford philosophy.”<sup>256</sup> This has been a longstanding theme of Taylor’s autobiography, as he explained in an interview:

I went to Oxford and did PPE and I was fed a lot of the typical “sense datum” stuff...which I thought just can’t be right. You can’t discuss any important issues of human life. Then—see this is where my real sources come in!—some other guy was there with me as an undergraduate who spoke Russian, spoke French, went to Paris all the time. He gave me a book of Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*. He said, “You sound as though you would benefit.” Benefit? I read it and it was like, “Wow! [laughs] This is what I’ve been looking for!”

So I started to work on that. *The Explanation of Behavior* in a way, is Merleau-Ponty heavily disguised in analytic language so that I could get it through the doctoral program.<sup>257</sup>

Taylor’s strategy to disguise his intellectual endeavours is discussed below, and his appreciation for Merleau-Ponty is not unrelated to his politics. Merleau-Ponty was a Marxist Communist and as Kerry Whiteside highlighted, “at one time the supposition that the Soviet Union might be on the road to establishing the first entirely nonviolent society in history was absolutely central to his views.”<sup>258</sup> His most influential work, *Phénoménologie de la*

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<sup>255</sup> Samuel, “Born-Again Socialism,” 43.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Charles Taylor and James K.A. Smith, “Why Do I See the World So Differently?” *Comment Magazine*, 14 August 2014, accessed 3 October 2023, <https://comment.org/why-do-i-see-the-world-so-differently/>.

<sup>258</sup> Kerry Whiteside, *Merleau-Ponty and the Foundation of Existential Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988; republished 2014), 4.

*perception*, which was vital for Taylor, was published in 1945—the same year as he founded the Marxist journal, *Les Temps modernes*, with Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980). Understanding that Merleau-Ponty was at his most committed to Marxist ideals as he wrote this seminal work sheds important light on the aims of his arguments. For example, his blistering phenomenological critique of Augustinian psychology: “Truth does not merely ‘dwell’ in the ‘inner man’; or rather, *there is no ‘inner man,’* man is in and toward the world, and it is in the world that he knows himself.”<sup>259</sup> This critique utilizes phenomenology to challenge atomistic conceptions of the self, that might encourage a person to think of themselves as a self-sufficient, self-contained or maybe even a “buffered self”, which is the philosophical anthropology that underpins liberalism and capitalism, rather than grasping their subjectivity as sown without obstruction into the organic life of their community and the cosmos—which would cultivate a sense of enchanted solidarity. As Whiteside observed, Merleau-Ponty realized “that some philosophical assumptions do not allow us to conceive of collective life in a way that thinking about politics demands. The complaint is epistemological.”<sup>260</sup> Taylor’s essay “Overcoming Epistemology” (1987)—notably archived at [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org)—applied Merleau-Ponty’s 1945 work in keeping with the socialist spirit in which it was written. Taylor argued that Merleau-Ponty could supply intellectual resources for,

an awareness that would help us overcome the illusions of disengagement and atomic individuality that are constantly being generated by a civilization founded on mobility and instrumental reason.<sup>261</sup>

Taylor’s prose may appear jargonistic and unclear, but once it is understood that his use of existential phenomenology facilitates this epistemological critique of the ideological

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<sup>259</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 11. Emphasis added.

<sup>260</sup> Whiteside, *Merleau-Ponty and the Foundation of Existential Politics*, 5. Emphasis added.

<sup>261</sup> Charles Taylor, “Overcoming Epistemology” in *Philosophical Arguments*, 1–19 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 14; <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/us/taylor.htm>.

substructure of Western capitalism e.g., the concepts of “atomistic individualism” and “instrumental reason” then these more jargonistic expressions become intelligible, and the aim of his indirect writing style becomes transparent.

The other key theoretical influence on the early New Left was the work of the former secretary of the Italian Communist Party, Antonio Gramsci. In 1957, Louis Marks (1928–2010) published a translation of selected works by Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, advertised in *ULR* Summer 1957.<sup>262</sup> Marks was a member of the Communist Party Historians Group with Hill and Samuel, and Hill wrote one of the earliest anglophone articles on Gramsci in the *New Reasoner*, Spring 1958.<sup>263</sup> Gramsci’s thought was not only translated by Taylor’s circle in the British New Left, but Hall has also explained that the group applied Gramscian theory through their involvement with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. The CND was founded in 1957 after Britain became the third world power to develop a nuclear weapon; it was a large and diverse movement. Yet as Hall explained, “the New Left also had a project in relation to CND: to broaden its politics; to ‘educate’, in Gramsci’s sense, the moral impulses which brought most people to the peace movement into a wider politics of the left”.<sup>264</sup> Taylor was both a founding editor of the *New Left Review*, and the first president of the Oxford CND.

In her article, “The Marxism of the British New Left” (2006), Madeline Davis presented a previously unpublished note from Perry Anderson (b. 1938), who studied at Eton College and then Worcester College, Oxford, from 1956 to 1959, and edited the *New Left Review* from 1962, immediately following Hall.<sup>265</sup> In that note, Anderson outlined that the New Left’s project was:

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<sup>262</sup> See *Universities and Left Review*, vol. 1 no. 2 (1957): 56; Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, trans. Louis Marks (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1957).

<sup>263</sup> Christopher Hill, “Antonio Gramsci,” *New Reasoner*, no. 4 (1958): 107–113.

<sup>264</sup> Hall, “The ‘First’ New Left,” 33.

<sup>265</sup> Madeline Davis, “The Marxism of the British New Left,” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2006): 335–358.

[T]o transform—very slowly—British culture—in particular by attempting to fill the huge historical gap left by the absence of any Marxist or sociological tradition in Britain...The key theoretical influences were to be the phenomenological/existential/Marxist tradition in France—mainly concerned with a normative-theoretical critique of capitalism and the development of a philosophical anthropology—and the Marxist tradition in Italy—mainly concerned with a richer historical understanding of capitalism in the West, and the development of an advanced socialist strategy to surpass it.<sup>266</sup>

This evidence should substantively recast the reception of Taylor’s thought. As a founding editor of the *New Left Review*, and “far more sophisticated philosophically” than the other figures, Taylor was an instigator of this strategy. He formed a link with French thought through his meeting with Merleau-Ponty in Paris—and supplied the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* that would enable the New Left to pivot away from reductive and antiquated economic analysis, recalibrate after the revelations of 1956, and redefine the socialist movement as addressing the broad existential concern of “alienation”; his self-definition of his life’s work is “philosophical anthropology”; his use of existential phenomenology to critique the normative-theoretical concepts undergirding capitalism by examining their “background” or intuitive apprehension is trademark; and he has signalled to his critics that Gramsci’s thought has been an inspiration for his incremental approach to advancing socialist ideology, which is perceptible in his historical writing.<sup>267</sup> Berlin was Taylor’s doctoral supervisor, and he perceived this historical dimension to Taylor’s critical project:

[What] attracts Taylor in Marxist ideas, I believe—and he seems to me to have been influenced by these in a fascinating fashion in both his metaphysical and social views—is the notion that human beings can only rise to their full stature and develop all the potentialities which belong to them...if human society is liberated from oppression, exploitation, domination, which are inevitable

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 347.

<sup>267</sup> Charles Taylor, “Charles Taylor Responds,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 29, no. 5 (2021): 809–823, 811–812.

consequences of...modern capitalism, but with their roots in various formations of the past.<sup>268</sup>

When Taylor addressed the *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left 30 Years On* conference at Oxford in 1987, two years before *Sources of the Self* was published, he stated his interest in,

[going] back over that whole tradition of thinking which generated both our conception of persons as bearers of rights and the crippling ideology of individuals as purely autonomous, self-responsible thinkers. These are two flowers from the same tree, but I think you can redo the tree in such a way as to attain one of these and exclude the other.<sup>269</sup>

Thirty years on from the founding of the *ULR*, and after his tenure as Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory, Taylor articulated his pragmatic view of scholarship and historical writing that appreciated both the intellectual's ability to understand past social imaginaries, and their political vocation to help create them in the present for the future. This approach is perceptible in *A Secular Age* through Taylor's critical genealogy of Western secularity—with its emphasis on nominalism, individualism, social contract theory, and instrumental reason as contributing to the nebulous concept, “Secularity 3”—and in his constructive theological proposals calling for participation within the “network of agape”. The initial inspiration for Taylor's method as an arborist of Western political philosophy and social theory goes back at least in part to the French Catholic Left. As Gauvreau explained, Catholic Action leaders evoked the term “Jansenism,” as “a code word denigrating a purely individualist spirituality that many in the Catholic Action movements dismissed as undergirding bourgeois civilization.”<sup>270</sup> Similarly, in *A Secular Age*, Taylor argued that “[t]he same long-term trend which produced the disciplined, conscious, committed individual believer, Calvinist, Jansenist, devout humanist, Methodist; which later

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<sup>268</sup> Berlin, “Introduction” in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, 2.

<sup>269</sup> Charles Taylor, “Marxism and Socialist Humanism,” 73.

<sup>270</sup> Gauvreau, “From Rechristianization to Contestation,” 814–815.

gives us the ‘born-again’ Christian, now has brought forth today’s pilgrim seeker, attempting to discern and follow his/her own path.”<sup>271</sup> The glaring anachronism that Methodism “later gives us the ‘born-again’ Christian” is only intelligible within the teleological framework of Taylor’s “Reform Master Narrative” where “born-again Christian” is a shorthand denoting a kind of modern Christian expressive individualism, one step removed from the ethics of authenticity. The “disciplined, conscious, committed individual believer” and the contemporary “pilgrim seeker, attempting to discern and follow his/her own path” are critical if clichéd tropes for the religiosity at both ends of bourgeois capitalism. Contrastingly, an ecclesiastical-historical Master Narrative would render the evidence with greater historical accuracy: it would not obscure the chronologically antecedent biblical theology and pneumatological doctrine expressed in Christ’s teaching “no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again” (Jn. 3:3) and would appreciate the experiential precedent over the *longue durée* of Christian history of the Holy Spirit’s work in granting new birth.

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<sup>271</sup> ASA, 532.

## Chapter Three.

### Charles Taylor, 1961–1970: Forgotten Sources of Taylor’s Self

*“So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.”*

—Genesis 45:8.

“[L]et’s remember Antonio Gramsci’s ‘pessimism of the intellect optimism of the will!’”

—Taylor ~ “Charles Taylor Responds”.<sup>272</sup>

After completing his doctoral work on psychological behaviourism with Berlin and Anscombe at All Souls, Taylor returned to Canada in 1961 as Assistant Professor of Political Science at McGill University. He had communicated that plans were afoot for his appointment to Beaubien in January 1961. “As you’ve probably heard I’ve got a job at McGill (it’s not official yet but there shouldn’t be any hitch) for next year, so we’ll be home soon to settle”.<sup>273</sup> The Island of Montréal was “home”, since Taylor’s family and his family history were woven through the place and its institutions (Rue Beaubien, Parc Beaubien, etc.); this sense of ancestral connection and responsibility presumably explains in large part why Taylor located the majority of his career at McGill. Moreover, his sense of vocation was not purely to the scholarly pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, as he acknowledged in his Kyoto Prize lecture: “my choice between the scholarly and active lives was never total; I have always tried to run them in some degree together.”<sup>274</sup> International academic influence was attainable through a prominent place on philosophy reading lists—and from there, ideas written at McGill could trickle into the rarefied atmosphere of seminar table

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<sup>272</sup> Charles Taylor, “Charles Taylor Responds,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 29, no. 5 (2021): 809–823, 811–812.

<sup>273</sup> Taylor to Beaubien, 26 January 1961, Beaubien MSS. Beaubien responded with his congratulations: Beaubien to Taylor, 31 January 1961, Beaubien MSS.

<sup>274</sup> Taylor, “What Drove Me to Philosophy?” 185.

discussions, reconfiguring the social imaginaries of graduate students in the process; simultaneously allowing him to maintain his political network and locus of influence on the ground in Canada. Even so, it is possible to detect a hint of a sense of limitation that academic employment constituted the main thread of his working life in the subsequent aside, “[n]evertheless, my decision [to do doctoral work] in 1955 meant that I would have a continuous university career, however distracted by other concerns.”<sup>275</sup> Distractions abounded. Taylor was under contract to write his book on Hegel from 1961—understandably it took almost fifteen years to complete, amid teaching responsibilities; family life; political activism and writing; and refining his dissertation for publication.<sup>276</sup> Family and politics were intertwined: the year before he returned, his uncle had been made Senator and Taylor had passed on his compliments. “My dear Louis, Many congratulations on your appointment to the Senate. Mother sent us a wire and we were very glad to learn it. I was sure it was going to happen one of these days. Will you have much time to attend? I certainly think you’ll liven things up.”<sup>277</sup> Taylor himself had plans to “liven things up” with the co-founding of a new political party and four electoral campaigns. His distant relative, Thérèse Casgrain (1896–1981), had been a leading figure in the Québec CCF and was instrumental in unifying her party with the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) to form the NDP in 1961.<sup>278</sup> In the 1960s the NDP were “assembling a dream team of candidates” including a charismatic law professor, Robert Cliché (1921–1978), and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation host, Laurier LaPierre (1929–2012), together with Charles Taylor to spearhead a modern, social democratic political campaign in Québec.<sup>279</sup> Due to its British

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Charles Taylor and Michael Rosen, “Charles Taylor: A Conversation with Michael Rosen – October 25, 2018,” *Edmond & Lily Safra Center for Ethics at Harvard*, 7 December 2018, accessed 20 July 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WadtRpja2Lo>.

<sup>277</sup> Taylor to Beaubien, 26 November 1960, Beaubien MSS.

<sup>278</sup> Roberta Lexier, Stephanie Bangarth, and Jonathan Weier, eds., *Party of Conscience: The CCF, the NDP, and Social Democracy in Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2018).

<sup>279</sup> Derek Leebosh, “NDP Hits the Jack-Pot in Quebec: From Decades of Work to Overnight Success,” *Policy Options Politiques*, 1 June 2011, accessed 26 July 2023, <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/fr/magazines/the->

Protestant flavour, the CCF had historically struggled to make electoral inroads with the French-Canadian Catholics in Québec in an era of Protestant–Catholic polarization; the Party had also originated in agrarian contexts during the Great Depression which gave it a certain “hayseed” image, according to Derek Leebosh.<sup>280</sup> The NDP therefore undertook to modernize this social democratic option in Canada and present voters with a more compelling “New” political alternative, left of the Liberal Party. In this situation, Taylor was a promising candidate who embodied the NDP’s vision: he was young and new to the stage; had a two-sided Anglo-Protestant and French Catholic heritage; was bilingual; had studied in Montréal, Oxford, and Paris; also, clean-cut and six-feet-seven-inches tall, he looked the part. His dual background was a particular asset because the British side of his identity likely helped him to hold the respect of the wider Party—and he climbed to National Vice-President of the NDP by 1966—while in Montréal his Beaubien family connections together with fluent French and impeccable accent made him a formidable candidate to the Québécois. Furthermore, his mixed religious background was uncommonly reflective of modern pluralist trends; for a Protestant to marry a Catholic in the early twentieth century was still culturally analogous to an Israelite marrying a Canaanite—it was the kind of choice that could rip families apart. Importantly, this mixed marriage placed Taylor at the interface of a dialectic that, read from a quasi-Hegelian perspective, was *aufgehoben* in his next generation liberal Catholicism. To spin it romantically, Taylor’s very self embodied one trailblazing path into modernity.

The policy platform that the NDP outlined in 1961 was socialist, pro-disarmament, and advanced a two-nations theory of Canadian society,

Our pride in Canada as a nation is enhanced by our consciousness of  
the two national cultures which form the basis of Canadian life. We

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winner/ndp-hits-the-jack-pot-in-quebec-from-decades-of-work-to-overnight-success/. See also, Paul-André Linteau, Jean-Claude Robert, and René Durocher, *Quebec Since 1930*, trans. Robert Chodos and Ellen Garmaise (James Lorimer and Company: Toronto, 1991), 261.

<sup>280</sup> Leebosh, “NDP Hits the Jack-Pot in Quebec”.

are indeed aware that those who have their roots in the French-speaking [sic] community frequently and legitimately use the word “nation” to describe French Canada itself. The New Democratic party believes that true Canadian unity depends on equal recognition and respect for both the main cultures of our country.<sup>281</sup>

The economic policies that the NDP proposed focused on taxing capital gains and dividends from corporations; the rhetorical lever for these anti-corporatist policies was nationalist, stressing the undue influence of American Corporations on Canadian life and policy.<sup>282</sup> The NDP and the Liberal Party differed in their approaches to corporatism, but the subject of French-Canadian nationalism was a major polarizing issue between Taylor and Trudeau. Even decades later in 2008, Taylor said, “Trudeau had a real problem. He was a great intellectual. I loved the guy. He was a great friend of mine. But he was just totally blind, he had such animosity against the Quebec nationalists that he couldn’t see that a kind of moderate nationalism was possible”.<sup>283</sup> Taylor ran for election throughout the 1960s: in 1962, 1963, 1965 and 1968; these elections occurred during and shortly after the years of the Quiet Revolution. In this period, a different kind of French-Canadian nationalism became much more dominant: “The modern nationalists” Taylor wrote in 1965, “were often anticlerical, if not unbelievers, and in any case the traditional conception of Catholicism in this society was anathema to them.”<sup>284</sup> The social policy changes wrought by Lesage’s government that had marginalized the influence of the Church, combined with the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, gave Catholics in Québec a destabilizing sense of

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<sup>281</sup> New Democratic Party, *The Federal Program of the New Democratic Party, Adopted by its Founding Convention, Ottawa, July 31–August 4, 1961* (Ontario: 1961), 22.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>283</sup> Rogers and Taylor, “Charles Taylor Interviewed”. See also, Taylor, *The Pattern of Politics*, 111. Taylor goes unmentioned in the relevant portion of Trudeau’s memoirs. See Pierre Elliot Trudeau, *Memoirs* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993), 70–107.

<sup>284</sup> Charles Taylor, “Nationalism and the Political Intelligentsia: A Case Study,” in *Reconciling the Solitudes: Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, 3–22, ed. Guy Laforest (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), 5–6. Originally published as Charles Taylor, “Nationalism and the Political Intelligentsia: A Case Study,” *Queen’s Quarterly*, no. 72 (1965): 150–168. See also, Michael D. Behiels, *Prelude to Quebec’s Quiet Revolution: Liberalism versus Neo-Nationalism, 1945–1960* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1985).

spiritual “rupture” that had relativized and undermined their faith, leading to rapid secularization.<sup>285</sup> Roman Catholicism had traditionally been a vital source of solidarity and a constituent feature of the collective (threatened) identity of French Canadians. According to Gauvreau, modernizing Canadian intellectuals such as Claude Ryan (1925–2004) and Fernand Dumont (1927–1997) were perceived to “‘sanction the diminution of the influence of the Church and the role of religious practice’ while still hoping for the ‘emergence of a renewed, purified, communitarian faith without the old moral constraints.’”<sup>286</sup> Taylor participated in this project—this longing is extrapolated unmistakably in *A Secular Age*—and he donated money to Ryan’s newspaper, *Le Devoir*.<sup>287</sup> While these progressives waited in hope for a new “communitarian faith” to flower after the Quiet Revolution, revolutionary nationalist groups that were secular and socialist—the *Rassemblement pour l’Indépendance Nationale* (RIN), the *Parti Québécois* (PQ), and the *Front de libération du Québec* (FLQ)—had emerged; they sought to ground solidarity primarily in the French language, and the FLQ used violence to pursue an independent socialist Québec.<sup>288</sup> So powerful was the rising tide of nationalist sentiment that Daniel Johnson (1915–1968) was able to mount the astonishing political comeback of the Conservative *Union Nationale* by establishing the Party as “the leading exponent of the nationalist persuasion in Quebec” to become Premier of Québec succeeding Lesage in 1966, and remaining in power until his death.<sup>289</sup> Johnson was still campaigning for the Province’s interests within the Federation, however.<sup>290</sup> The

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<sup>285</sup> Rudy Fenwick, “Social Change and Ethnic Nationalism: An Historical Analysis of the Separatist Movement in Quebec,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 23, no. 2 (1981): 196–216, 207.

<sup>286</sup> Michael Gauvreau, “‘Without making a noise’: The Dumont Commission and the Drama of Quebec’s Dechristianization, 1968–1971,” in *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945–2000*, 186–216, eds. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

<sup>287</sup> Taylor to Beaubien, 9 February 1960, Beaubien MSS. Cf. *ASA*, 747–752.

<sup>288</sup> Jose Santiago, “Religion, Secularisation and Nationalism in Quebec and the Basque Country: A Comparative Approach,” *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2015): 120–138, 125.

<sup>289</sup> Herbert F. Quinn, *The Union Nationale: Quebec Nationalism from Duplessis to Levesque* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), 211.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

French-Canadians' sense of distinct identity was a potent sentiment but its political expression existed on a spectrum from the separatist violence of the FLQ, through the two-nations vision of the NDP, to the Liberal accommodationist approach of Trudeau (himself a French Quebecer).<sup>291</sup> Trudeau's wariness of nationalism was drawn from liberal Christian sources, and he boosted his profile as a spokesperson for federalism in a televised debate with Johnson in January 1968, while he was serving as Justice Minister in the Liberal Cabinet of Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson (1897–1972).<sup>292</sup> Trudeau had ascended rapidly up the Party ladder after winning election as an MP in the race against Taylor in 1965. When Pearson resigned as Leader of the Liberal Party on 6 April 1968, Trudeau entered the ensuing leadership contest and became Leader of the Party and Prime Minister of Canada on 20 April 1968. He called for a federal election on 25 June 1968. The dramatic moment of this campaign occurred at the Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day parade in Montréal on 24 June, when Trudeau was attacked by separatist protesters hurling rocks and bottles at him, but he stood unflinchingly. The incident was televised and widely perceived as a courageous act of resistance against the violent minority. Trudeau's Liberal Party won a robust majority with 155 seats; the NDP won 22 seats overall, and none in Québec. On paper, Taylor had potential to make a breakthrough for social democracy, but after four campaigns, he had been unable to make progress.

Ultimately, the NDP was a marginal Party and Trudeau's approach to coexistence disappointed Taylor's romantic hopes for a modern polysemic communitarianism. In *A Secular Age* the traces of these experiences are perceptible in Taylor's empathetic exposition of the theology he had appreciated from Péguy:

We can see how Péguy confused his contemporaries, and was almost impossible to place. This left socialist Dreyfusard, a believer in revolution and in the Republic, passionately insisted on the need to

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<sup>291</sup> Trudeau, *Memoirs*, 73–74, 87–88.

<sup>292</sup> Max Nemni and Monique Nemni, *Trudeau Transformed: The Shaping of a Statesman 1944–1965*, trans. George Tombs (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2011), 70–72.

root one's action in the millennial, including Catholic, past of France. So is he a reactionary? But he also passionately denounced the clerical, anti-Dreyfusard party, precisely for their desire to re-impose old forms: monarchy, clerical dominance, in their outmoded form, without ever considering how the tradition had grown and changed.

For Péguy the millennial tradition of France included the Revolution. This sounds less paradoxical as soon as one takes into account that this was the tradition of the French *people*, not of elite institutions. In a political field in which the Left believed in (objectifying) science and progress, which relegated the past to oblivion; and the Right was fighting to go back to the institutions of the ancien regime, it is no wonder that Péguy's was a lonely voice, and his thought was constantly travestied by friend and foe alike.<sup>293</sup>

Taylor evidently identified with Péguy. A Catholic and a Socialist, committed to progress but seeking for that progress to unfold organically from within the community and its traditions. Péguy and Taylor both stood against particular kinds of Leftism and Rightist thought in their attitude to the past: they longed for creative appropriation from the past in a way that neither "relegated" it "to oblivion" as the old Left did, but nor were they "fighting to go back" in some reactionary way to an ostensible golden age. Modernity had brought irrevocable change, and some old modes of life and society had simply passed. Nevertheless, Péguy perceived that the Church traditions were as much a part of that process of development as the revolutionary anti-clericalism of eighteenth-century French republicanism. Hence there was the "need" to "root one's action" in the "Catholic past, of France" a millennial tradition which also "included the Revolution." As Taylor put it empathetically, "he could see the Republic, and later socialism, as the re-expression of the French popular tradition, in profound continuity with it."<sup>294</sup> Indeed, Taylor drew *A Secular Age* to a close by citing Robert Bellah (1927–2013): "nothing is ever lost".<sup>295</sup> It seems that Taylor's hope was for all of this to be *aufgehoben* in a communitarian pluralism, which

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<sup>293</sup> ASA, 747. Emphasis original.

<sup>294</sup> ASA, 748.

<sup>295</sup> ASA, 772, citing Robert Bellah, "What is Axial about the Axial Age?", *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2005): 69–89, 72. "The whole argument is developed at length in Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (forthcoming)." ASA, 851.

found expression for him through a liberal Catholicism in continuity with his own aristocratic Québécois heritage. Noting Péguy in the background, it is possible to understand Taylor's course through the Canadian politics of the 1960s. He was a progressive liberal Catholic, a socialist with nationalist sympathies. This was always destined to be a minority position appealing only to a small caste of intellectuals, "it is no wonder that Péguy's was a lonely voice, and his thought was constantly travestied by friend and foe alike." In the reception of *A Secular Age*, Taylor's work has been similarly travestied as a reactionary Catholic project to get back to an "enchanted" epoch.<sup>296</sup> But the "Social Philosophy to Pursue the Co-Existence of Diverse Cultures" that the Kyoto Prize committee esteemed was for his work to try to cultivate a modern solidarity, and the past gave models for that, models that were accessible to his imagination given his own childhood and youth in Québec. That context, however marginal and forgotten, shaped Taylor's writing and philosophy in ways that decisively contour his reading of early modern Protestantism, from his anti-clerical critique of Baxter's political theology to his constructive pluralist reading of Edwards's religious affections.

Direct insight into Taylor's vision by the late 1960s is available through two of his publications. First, his contribution to the volume, *From Culture to Revolution* (1968), which was originally a paper presented to the 1967 Slant Symposium: "From Marxism to the Dialogue Society."<sup>297</sup> The *Slant* journal was founded in 1966 as a forum for the Catholic Left in England; its leading figures included Terry Eagleton (b. 1943), Brian Wicker (b. 1929), and Fergus Kerr (b. 1931).<sup>298</sup> Speaking in that milieu, Taylor gave several clarion

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<sup>296</sup> Günter Thomas, "The Temptation of Religious Nostalgia: Protestant Readings of *A Secular Age*," in *Working With A Secular Age: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Charles Taylor's Master Narrative*, 49–70, eds., Florian Zemmin, Colin Jager, and Guido Vanheeswijck (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 54: "the measure, the gold standard, is 'early religion,' religion before the Axial Age. This is a thoroughly 'enchanted' world, full of spirits and demons, a world in which moral powers are felt and present in the events of one's life and in one's environment." For the assessment of *ASA* as a work of Catholic apologetics see, *Ibid.*, 58–59. For Taylor's response to this charge see Taylor, "Afterword," in *Working with A Secular Age*, 381–382.

<sup>297</sup> Taylor, "From Marxism to the Dialogue Society," in *From Culture to Revolution*, 148–181.

<sup>298</sup> Alan Wall, "'Slant' and the Language of Revolution," *New Blackfriars*, vol. 56, no. 666 (1975): 506–516.

calls to Catholics on the Left: (1) “The problem is to find a new basis for a radical socialism”; (2) “in primitive society all these communities, that of God, of society, of the family, are one”; (3) “the task of socialism is still to focus the common purpose and bring about the primacy of collective control”; (4) “a community of this kind must help to link men to what they consider to be ultimate realities”; (5) “authentic community...requires that we find a common sense of ultimate reality”; (6) “we re-appropriate our society collectively or not at all”; and (7) “socialists need a renewed conception of the goal at which they aim, in short, of the socialist society”.<sup>299</sup> In Canada these priorities were expressed with a view to their practical enactment by the NDP in the so-called “Waffle Manifesto” (1969), which Taylor signed.<sup>300</sup> Formally known as the NDP’s “Manifesto for an Independent Socialist Canada”, it included several points that strongly exhibit Taylor’s influence.<sup>301</sup> For example, its second paragraph: “The achievement of socialism awaits the building of a mass base of socialists, in factories and offices, on farms and campuses. The development of socialist consciousness, on which can be built a socialist base, must be the first priority of the New Democratic Party.”<sup>302</sup> The evangelistic zeal of the *New Left Review*’s inaugural mission statement integrated with CCF-NDP history, focusing on rural communities alongside university campuses, seeking the “development of a socialist consciousness”. Additionally, Taylor’s

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<sup>299</sup> Taylor, “From Marxism to the Dialogue Society,” in *From Culture to Revolution*, 148, 162, 173, 174, 175, 178, 180–181.

<sup>300</sup> Ivan Avakumović, *Socialism in Canada: A Study of the CCF-NDP in Federal and Provincial Politics* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), 200.

<sup>301</sup> David G. Blocker, “‘To Waffle to the Left:’ The Waffle, the New Democratic Party, and Canada’s New Left during the Long Sixties,” PhD Dissertation, The University of Western Ontario, 2019. Blocker described Taylor as “the NDP’s leading public intellectual” and recorded that Taylor, “who had signed and subsequently repudiated the Waffle Manifesto, collaborated with NDP deputy leader David Lewis in producing a statement ‘For a United and Independent Canada,’ that both acknowledged the Manifesto’s popularity within the party and attempted a repudiation of its more radical elements. In response to widely shared concerns about expanding foreign ownership, the Taylor/Lewis document called for the creation of a Canada Development Corporation and held public ownership as one important, but not exclusive, means of limiting and regulating foreign ownership of the Canadian economy.” 153. This “Marshmallow Manifesto” moderated the anti-American thrust of the previous statement but still maintained: “The New Democratic Party is convinced that this cannot be achieved without the philosophy and policies of democratic socialism.” 493.

<sup>302</sup> Michael Cross, ed. “Waffle Manifesto,” in *The Decline and Fall of a Good Idea: CCF-NDP Manifestoes 1932 to 1969* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1974), 43–45, 43.

nationalist sentiments aligned with the Manifesto's seventeenth paragraph: "Quebec's history and aspirations must be allowed full expression".<sup>303</sup> And Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* clearly inspired the twenty-third paragraph: "By bringing men together primarily as buyers and sellers of each other, by enshrining profitability and material gain in place of humanity and spiritual growth, capitalism has always been inherently alienating...A socialist transformation of society will return man to his sense of humanity, to replace his sense of being a commodity."<sup>304</sup> The third, twenty-fourth, and twenty-sixth paragraphs reflect Gramsci's influence even more sharply. For the third paragraph read, "the New Democratic Party must be seen as the parliamentary wing of a movement dedicated to fundamental social change. It must be radicalized from within and it must be radicalized from without."<sup>305</sup> While the twenty-fourth stated, "Socialism is a process and a program. The process is the raising of socialist consciousness, the building of a mass base of socialists, and a strategy to make visible the limits of liberal capitalism."<sup>306</sup> Thus, the call for a "strategy to make visible the limits of liberal capitalism" that was attested by Perry Anderson was visibly transplanted onto the Canadian scene. Point twenty-six was the climactic finale to the manifesto:

The struggle to build a democratic socialist Canada must proceed at all levels of Canadian society. The New Democratic Party is the organization suited to bringing these activities into a common focus. The New Democratic Party has grown out of a movement for democratic socialism that has deep roots in Canadian history. It is the core around which should be mobilized the social and political movement necessary for building an independent socialist Canada. The New Democratic Party must rise to that challenge or become irrelevant. Victory lies in joining the struggle.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 45.

As Ivan Avakumović recorded, Taylor's signed this document. These points were a modern Canadian expression of what Gramsci had taught in "The Modern Prince" as it was translated by Louis Marks and the British New Left:

The modern prince, the myth-prince, cannot be a real person, a concrete individual; it can only be an organism; a complex element of society in which the cementing of a collective will, recognised and partially asserted in action has already begun. This organism is already provided by historical development and it is the political party: the first cell containing the germs of collective will which are striving to become universal and total.<sup>308</sup>

After engaging with Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) to consider the nature of political power in modernity, Gramsci concluded that because power was maintained through cultural hegemony, socialists must subversively infiltrate loci of cultural influence to redefine the values of Western society, and the vehicle for that project had to be a party, "a complex element of society" that worked towards "the cementing of a collective will". That was the role of the "myth-prince"—to embody and germinate a social master narrative. Taylor's Gramscian scholarship was foreshadowed for an NDP audience in his essay, "The Agony of Economic Man," published in the volume, *Essays on the Left: Essays in Honour of T.C. Douglas* (1971), which he co-edited.<sup>309</sup> His contribution to this collection for the NDP Leader and Premier of Saskatchewan, Thomas Douglas (1904–1986), illustrates how his critical social theory dovetailed with the epistemological sentiment expressed by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), "*Ein Bild hielt uns gefangen/a picture held us captive.*"<sup>310</sup> Taylor's essay articulated a statement of social-theoretical intent continuous with his intellectual agenda from the 1950s, reengaging the problems that inspired the British New

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<sup>308</sup> *MPOW*, 135–188, 137.

<sup>309</sup> Charles Taylor, "The Agony of Economic Man," in *Essays on the Left: Essays in Honour of T.C. Douglas*, 221–235, eds., Laurier LaPierre, Jack McLeod, Charles Taylor, and Walter Young (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971).

<sup>310</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. and trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 53–53e. Emphasis original. Cf. Charles Taylor, "Overcoming Modern Epistemology," in *Faithful Reading: New Essays in Theology in Honour of Fergus Kerr, OP*, 43–60, eds., Simon Oliver, Karen Kilby, and Thomas O'Loughlin (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

Left: “In the coming years the thought and program of socialism will have to be worked out afresh. Of course, socialism is always rethinking itself, but the present transformation will have to be the most far-reaching in the past century—since the appearance of *Das Kapital* in 1867.”<sup>311</sup> Situating his thought in this line from Marx, Taylor argued that two facts had not been adequately appreciated by theorists on the Left: (1) that the decline of Western society’s “economic justifying image really could threaten our civilization with breakdown”; and (2) that “socialism has traditionally defined itself in terms of its own version of the productive society, hence its own economic justifying image.”<sup>312</sup> The focal concept for Taylor’s social theory was the “economic justifying image,” more accessibly explored in his later work on the modern Western “social imaginary.”<sup>313</sup> These twin themes of the decline of the old image on the one hand, and the inadequacy of the existing socialist image on the other, were considered in his essay. With regard to the former problem of the declining old image, he noted the paradox of modernization from the socialist perspective: “Modern industrial society has developed by undermining and sapping the strength of the traditional foundations of solidarity: the sense of religious community, of primary group loyalty, of allegiance to age-old authority.”<sup>314</sup> Taylor’s analysis illuminates an important dimension of his sociological interest in secularization, demonstrably inflected by his Canadian setting, as he perceived that the decline in the “traditional foundations of solidarity” created an opening for an immanent “nationalism” to fill.<sup>315</sup> Hence his concern for social stability as the imaginative hold of the old image diminished, which has not been assuaged with the passage of time.<sup>316</sup> On the other hand, Taylor was frustrated that socialist

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<sup>311</sup> Charles Taylor, “The Agony of Economic Man,” in *Essays on the Left: Essays in Honour of T.C. Douglas*, 221–235, eds., Laurier LaPierre, Jack McLeod, Charles Taylor, and Walter Young (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), 221.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>313</sup> Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 23.

<sup>314</sup> Taylor, “The Agony of Economic Man,” in *Essays on the Left*, 224.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, 221, 224, 231.

<sup>316</sup> See Charles Taylor, *Reconstructing Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

theory was still based on a vision of society as the productive society. This prompted him to address the dilemma, “what is involved in rethinking socialism for our time.”<sup>317</sup> An obstacle for Taylor’s political hope, as he had outlined to the Slant Symposium, was the problem of social cohesion following the transformation of material conditions in modernity. As he put it, “socialist thought has to tackle this central problem of evolving a different foundation for technological society,” that was necessary, he argued, “if the socialist alternative is to be fully relevant to our time.”

Without a genuine alternative to the economic image, socialism in the West will be condemned either to offer alternative variants of the cult of production, which will certainly be ignored, or to stand inactive in the foolish hope that any destruction of the present order will inaugurate a socialist era.<sup>318</sup>

Technological society was integrated with a particular “economic self-image of modern society, and this in turn is linked to a set of powerfully entrenched conceptions of what the value of human life consists in,” Taylor explained, “as long as technological society is held together and given its legitimacy and cohesion by this economic self-image, it will tend to remain fixed on its present goals, the perpetual increase in production and the ever-widening bonanza of consumption.”<sup>319</sup> According to Taylor, a drastic reworking of socialist theory needed to occur at the level of formulating and disseminating a different kind of justifying image for society. In his words, “we have to evolve a different foundation for technological society, a quite different self-definition to serve as the basis of cohesion.”<sup>320</sup> That Taylor found resources for this project in Wittgenstein is not incidental. In conversation with Rowland Hutt, Wittgenstein had said, “I am a communist, *at heart*.”<sup>321</sup> In the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein acknowledged his indebtedness to the Cambridge economist,

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<sup>317</sup> Taylor, “The Agony of Economic Man,” in *Essays on the Left*, 233.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Vintage, 1991), 343. Emphasis original.

Piero Sraffa (1898–1983), for “the most consequential ideas of this book.”<sup>322</sup> The Turin-born Sraffa was a friend and correspondent of Gramsci’s.<sup>323</sup> Amartya Sen has therefore written of “an evident ‘Gramsci connection’ in the shift from the early Wittgenstein to the later Wittgenstein,” and John Willinsky alluded that this connection “poses an interesting question for Wittgenstein’s shift to a socialized notion of language and meaning.”<sup>324</sup> Cognizance of this intellectual history and the intertextual Western Marxism of Taylor’s scholarship clarifies the meaning of Taylor’s proposal that the philosophies of Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger, “can both serve as sources for the kind of humanism that would raise an adequate challenge to the hegemony of bureaucratic-technical reason in our lives.”<sup>325</sup> Taylor’s appropriation from these sources for the theory undergirding *A Secular Age* is discussed in chapter five. His essay for Thomas Douglas concluded with an attestation to his commitment as a socialist political theorist: “We therefore need a rewriting of socialist theory as complete and far-reaching as that of Karl Marx a hundred years ago. The greatest of socialist theories then was born out of an acute sense of crisis. Perhaps we will be lucky enough to repeat this exploit once more.”<sup>326</sup> Taylor published this desire to repeat Marx’s achievement as a forty-year-old father of five, only several years before acceding to the Chichele Chair of Social and Political Theory at All Souls: engagements with *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age* cannot overlook this defining feature of his intellectual and political vocation.

In the midst of his political activism throughout the 1960s, Taylor had also been involved with the “Study Group on Foundations of Cultural Unity” chaired by Michael

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<sup>322</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4e.

<sup>323</sup> Joseph A. Buttigieg, ed. *Antonio Gramsci: Prison Notebooks. Volume I*. trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 1–5.

<sup>324</sup> Amartya Sen, “Sraffa, Wittgenstein, and Gramsci,” *Journal of Economic Literature*, vol. 41, no. 4 (2003): 1240–1255, 1252; John Willinsky, “Chapter 9: Wittgenstein’s Dictionary,” *Counterpoints*, vol. 184 (2001): 187–219, fn5.

<sup>325</sup> Charles Taylor, “Lichtung or Lebensform: Parallels between Heidegger and Wittgenstein,” in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 61–78, 78.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

Polanyi (1891–1976); Marjorie Grene (1910–2009) and Edward Pols (1919–2005) also sat on the organizing committee.<sup>327</sup> The focus of the Group’s committee was clear: “we propose a meeting of a number of persons who actively oppose in their work the scientism, and the related methodological and ontological oversimplifications, which in one form or another are ascendent in every field of scholarly and creative endeavour.” Funded by the Ford Foundation, their first meetings were at Bowdoin College in 1965 and 1966.<sup>328</sup> From 1967 the Group changed its name to the “Study Group on the Unity of Knowledge” with a first meeting at MIT; they then met at a range of universities until 1972. The Group was a veritable “who’s who” of the mid-twentieth-century philosophical scene: Alasdair MacIntyre (b. 1929), Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), Hilary Putnam (1926–2016), John Searle (b. 1932), and Richard Rorty (1931–2007) attended at different times. Taylor was a committed affiliate, attending eleven of the Group’s meetings. The fruits of these gatherings were published in three volumes edited by Grene: *The Anatomy of Knowledge* (1969), *Toward a Unity of Knowledge* (1969), and *Interpretations of Life and Mind: Essays Around the Problem of Reduction* (1971).<sup>329</sup> Taylor is recorded in these volumes as contributing to question-and-answer sessions after various papers. On one occasion, after Polanyi presented a paper, Taylor challenged: “One of the things I don’t understand is why, in your analysis the concept of society figures not at all. Why do you insist only on the personal; why is the individual never placed within his community for you? Is there some reason for that?” To

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<sup>327</sup> Marjorie Grene, ed. *The Anatomy of Knowledge*. See also, Charles W. Lowney, ed., *Charles Taylor, Michael Polanyi and the Critique of Modernity: Pluralist and Emergentist Directions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). Gus Breyspraak and Phil Mullins, “Polanyi and the Study Group for the Unity of Knowledge (SGUK),” *Tradition & Discovery*, vol. 46, no. 3 (2020): 4–27.

<sup>328</sup> William Taussig and Martin X. Moleski, *Michael Polanyi: Scientist and Philosopher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 258–278, 258.

<sup>329</sup> Marjorie Grene, ed., *The Anatomy of Knowledge: Papers Presented to the Study Group on Foundations of Cultural Unity, Bowdoin College, 1965 and 1966* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); Marjorie Grene, ed., *Toward a Unity of Knowledge* (New York, NY: International Universities Press, 1969); Marjorie Grene, ed., *Interpretations of Life and Mind: Essays around the Problem of Reduction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).

which Polanyi responded, “No, just the lack of space, you see.”<sup>330</sup> The exchange illustrates how Taylor incrementally contended for his political outlook at a conceptual level in the echelons of Western philosophical discussion.<sup>331</sup> The Group also provided valuable interlocutors for Taylor as the discussions considered the theme of his doctoral research: psychological behaviourism. Grene’s introduction to Part IV of *Toward a Unity of Knowledge*, “New Approaches to Psychology,” observed that “[i]t is especially important,” for the Study Group to “concern itself with the problem of reductionism and its alternatives in the behavioral sciences.”<sup>332</sup> Her introduction highlighted the contribution from Erwin Straus (1891–1975), a German psychiatrist and émigré to the United States who “showed us...how fruitful the phenomenological approach can prove itself in dealing with psychological issues.”<sup>333</sup> Straus’s early work had utilized phenomenology to critically engage the Stimulus–Response psychology of Ivan Pavlov (1849–1936).<sup>334</sup> His paper for the Study Group was titled: “Embodiment and Excarnation”.<sup>335</sup> And his research agenda paralleled Taylor’s doctoral work, “[t]he material for this study was obtained as a by-product of experiments arranged with the intention of refuting the ‘reflex theory’ of action.”<sup>336</sup> The *ULR* recorded that Taylor had “completed a thesis on the theory of alienation, from Hegel to the Existentialists” during his second BA, but his doctoral project was titled “The Explanation of Behaviour in Social Science”.<sup>337</sup> It is plausible that this shift in Taylor’s focus was nudged by the revelation in 1956 of Stalin’s interest in neo-Pavlovian reflex

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<sup>330</sup> Michael Polanyi, “The Creative Imagination,” in *Toward a Unity of Knowledge*, 53–91, 91.

<sup>331</sup> On another occasion Taylor argued: “In the 17th century people thought society rested on some kind of clever ideal that someone had thought up to make us healthier, happier, saying, ‘Let’s all get together and sign a social contract.’ But this misses the psychological depth of the social instinct in man completely.” *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>332</sup> Grene, *Toward A Unity of Knowledge*, 215.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>334</sup> Erwin Straus, *The Primary World of Senses: A Vindication of Sensory Experience*, trans. Jacob Needleman (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1963); L. M. Ratnapalan and David Reggio, “Erwin Straus and the Pathic,” *History of Psychiatry*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2012): 291–304, 297–298.

<sup>335</sup> Erwin Straus, “Embodiment and Excarnation,” in *Toward a Unity of Knowledge*, 217–250.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 217. Cf. Taylor, *The Explanation of Behaviour*.

<sup>337</sup> Caldwell, “Charles Taylor and the pre-history of British cultural studies,” 366fn6. The title was amended and the words “in Social Science” were added in pencil.

conditioning, which was a point of concern for the New Left, and represented a confluence of his interests.<sup>338</sup> *The Explanation of Behaviour* (1964) is recognized for the critical response it provided to the faltering neo-behaviourism of B. F. Skinner (1904–1990) and John Watson (1878–1958).<sup>339</sup> However, Taylor’s longstanding concerns were also engaged through this work, for example, he contextualized behaviourist theory within the history of philosophy: “[t]he neo-behaviourist or stimulus–response (S–R) theories...are, in many ways, the descendants of classical empiricism”; similarly, he argued against his perennial foil, the “Assumptions of Atomism”; and he highlighted that the writings of stimulus–response theorists bear the “heavy imprint of the Yankee Protestant anti-hedonistic work-ethic”.<sup>340</sup> *The Explanation of Behaviour* may profitably be compared with Straus’s *Vom Sinn der Sinne/The Primary World of Senses: A Vindication of Sensory Experience* (1935; second ed. 1953; trans. 1963), where Straus argued against Pavlovian theory as based in a philosophical tradition from Cartesian and Lockean epistemology that generated an atomistic conception of sense data.<sup>341</sup> Jonathan Kim-Reuter has located Straus’s work in the tradition of “philosophical anthropology” and observed parallels between Straus’s project and Merleau-Ponty’s.<sup>342</sup> Indeed, Straus explained the concept of “positionality” developed by Helmuth Plessner (1892–1985) to Taylor during one of the question-and-answer sessions by describing how it referred to the “boundary” between an individual animal and its environment.<sup>343</sup> In his paper on “Embodiment and Excarnation,” Straus introduced the

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<sup>338</sup> Robert C. Tucker, “Stalin and the Uses of Psychology,” *World Politics*, vol. 8, no. 4 (1956): 455–483; E. P. Thompson, “Socialist Humanism: An Epistle to the Philistines,” *New Reasoner*, no. 1 (1957): 105–123, “the Stalinist is fixated by Pavlov’s dogs”, 122; Taylor, *The Explanation of Behaviour*, 127: “Watson was one of the pioneers of this kind of theory, which also owes a great debt to the researches of Pavlov.”

<sup>339</sup> Nicholas Smith, *Charles Taylor: Meaning, Morals and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 248fn9: “my first book was a vicious attack on, a stab to the heart of, behaviourist psychology’. But ‘the victim was dead before the knife entered its vitals.’”

<sup>340</sup> Taylor, *The Explanation of Behaviour*, 10–17, 127, 263.

<sup>341</sup> Straus, *The Primary World of Senses*, 15, 24. Cf. Taylor, *The Explanation of Behaviour*, 95–97.

<sup>342</sup> Jonathan Kim-Reuter, “Bringing Heidegger Back to Earth: Erwin Straus’ Phenomenological Anthropology,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2010): 403–422.

<sup>343</sup> Helmuth Plessner, “A Newton of a Blade of Grass?” in *Toward a Unity of Knowledge*, 135–176, 160.

concept of excarnation by describing some of his experiments, which had asked the subjects to perform various graphological tasks, e.g. writing the letters USA with their left hand on a blackboard behind them. When they concentrated on the task, Straus recorded that some of his subjects, “closed their eyes, virtually removing themselves from the scene. We are accustomed to call absent-minded one who walks around deep in his thoughts, unaware of his environment; perhaps we may just as well call him absent-bodied, because he does not dwell in the actual here and now; he performs an ‘ekbasis.’”<sup>344</sup> Through these experiments, Straus developed a phenomenology of “thinking,” and explored the relationship between abstract thought and this kind of “excarnation”; he concluded his paper with an allusion to Heidegger:

Seeing and thinking are two different modes of being-in-the-world...Conceptual thinking requires a radical ekbasis from any particular position. We may say that because man can perform such ekbasis from his social and physical environment and finally from his own corporeal existence, he is able to think. The characteristic attitude of the thinker expresses this “excarnation”—the price man must pay for his intellectual and spiritual achievements.<sup>345</sup>

It may seem quite a leap, but within this obscure philosophical terrain Straus’s oppositional framing of abstract thought and embodied life studied through graphology maps onto the *Lebensphilosophie* of the neo-pagan occultist, Ludwig Klages (1872–1956), which has recently been examined by Jason Josephson-Storm and Paul Bishop.<sup>346</sup> Indeed, Straus cited Klages on several occasions.<sup>347</sup> Josephson-Storm has highlighted Klages’s influence on an array of twentieth-century thinkers, ranging from Heidegger to the theorists of the Frankfurt School, and thereby presented Klages as a key figure in mediating “a left-Weberian critique

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<sup>344</sup> Straus, “Embodiment and Excarnation,” in *Toward a Unity of Knowledge*, 224.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, 235–236.

<sup>346</sup> Jason Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 209–239; Paul Bishop, *Ludwig Klages and the Philosophy of Life: A Vitalist Toolkit* (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>347</sup> Straus, *The Primary World of Senses*, 406fn2, 414fn2.

of modernity.”<sup>348</sup> By noting Klages’s influence in stimulating the critical discourses surrounding disenchantment, instrumental reason, the domination of nature, and alienation, he concluded, “having read Klages, we can see that important aspects of this critique originated in the fin-de-siècle occult milieu. So on these grounds, all the various left-Weberian attempts to overcome instrumental rationality or the iron cage by way of re-enchantment might now seem suspect.”<sup>349</sup> This subterranean element in Taylor’s non-reductive socialist humanism swells in his narrative occasionally; for example, he clearly echoes Klagesian themes whilst cautiously guarding against too close an association in his discussion of “excarnation”:

The repression and marginalization of one such facet [Taylor is referring to “important facets of spiritual life, which had in fact flourished in earlier ‘paganisms’, for all their faults”] is the process that I’ve been referring to here as “excarnation”, the steady disembodiment of spiritual life, so that it is less and less carried in deeply meaningful bodily forms, and lies more and more “in the head”. It’s not that I’m trying to say that Christianity, for instance, is inferior to paganism in that, whatever else it has, it lacks the full sense of embodiment of the earlier forms it displaced. Rather I am saying that Christianity, as the faith of the incarnate God, is denying something essential to itself as long as it remains wedded to forms which excarneate.<sup>350</sup>

The theological implications of Taylor’s critique of orthodox Protestantism producing “excarnation” are explored in chapter seven, but at this stage it is sufficient to demonstrate the intellectual-historical point that this line of thought emerged from, as Josephson-Storm has shown, a “fin-de-siècle occult milieu.” Straus’s concern that through abstract thinking, each person can “perform such an exbasis from his *social* and physical environment” perceptibly informs Taylor’s socialist humanist critique of “excarnation”:

Similarly in his [Ivan Illich’s] tracing of our self-conception as users of tools, as separable instruments; and then into our sense of ourselves as parts of systems (chapter 13). We move ever farther

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<sup>348</sup> Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment*, 239.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>350</sup> *ASA*, 771.

away from the lived body. This is the process I spoke about earlier with the term “excarnation”.

This takes us ever farther away from the network of agape. This can only be created in enfleshment. Agape moves outward from the guts; the New Testament word or “taking pity”, *splangnizesthai*, places the response in the bowels. We cease being able to make sense of this the more we go along with these alienating self-images. Resurrection only makes sense when we take seriously enfleshment (p. 214), i.e., overcome excarnation.

But the alienating view is also partly a creation of Christianity.<sup>351</sup>

In this extract, various Leftist motifs converged: “our self-conception as users of tools, as separable instruments...our sense of ourselves as part of systems” as a left-Weberian hermeneutical phenomenology of instrumental rationality; the politically attuned conception of excarnation taking subjects “ever farther away from the network of agape”; the Gramscian education of Christian moral sentiments into a wider politics of the Left; ethical coexistence foiled by “these alienating self-images”; and even the nuanced concession to Klages, “the alienating view is also partly a creation of Christianity.” This phenomenology cohered with Marx’s argument in the *Manuscripts*, that intellectual abstraction was the source of humanity’s alienation.<sup>352</sup> In his recent book, *Touch: Recovering Our most Vital Sense* (2021), Richard Kearney credited Taylor in a footnote for teaching him the term: “I first heard the term *excarnation* from my Canadian teacher, Charles Taylor, who directed my graduate studies at McGill University, Montreal, in 1976–1977.”<sup>353</sup> Such was Taylor’s *modus operandi* to disseminate ideas that would undergird the books of the next generation, it is doubtful Kearney knows the origin of his own concepts.

Whether or not Charles Taylor’s later academic work can be interpreted as radical and progressive has been a topic of recent debate. When the *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* published a volume celebrating Taylor’s ninetieth birthday, Jason

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<sup>351</sup> ASA, 741.

<sup>352</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 164.

<sup>353</sup> Richard Kearney, *Touch: Recovering Our Most Vital Sense* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2021), 2, 141fn1. Emphasis original.

Blakely contributed a landmark article, “Radicalizing and Deradicalizing Charles Taylor” (2021), that adjudicated internal debates between Marxists and critical theorists in their evaluation of Taylor’s left-wing bona fides.<sup>354</sup> Ian Fraser, for example, has interpreted Taylor as moderating his radical politics under the influence of his Catholic faith.<sup>355</sup> Blakely, however, developed his own “radicalized reading”, finding resources in Taylor’s later and religious works for the “transcending of the liberal-capitalist order from within.”<sup>356</sup> Blakely was well placed to develop this reading as he completed his PhD thesis at the University of California, Berkeley, contrasting Taylor’s thought with Alasdair MacIntyre’s: a key point of contact for these thinkers, Blakely observed, was their formative involvement with the New Left.<sup>357</sup> In his published response to Blakely’s essay, Taylor indicated that his political goals and strategies have developed since his involvement in the British New Left. “Have I become less radical? There’s a lot to be said for that reading, particularly if we define ‘radical’ politics by the goal of abolishing capitalism. But on the other hand,” Taylor suggested, “maybe we need to examine what this goal entails.”<sup>358</sup> Taylor does not believe capitalism can be abolished, “‘capitalism’ will survive in some form”, but he thinks it might be *overcome*.<sup>359</sup> As he put it, “overcoming capitalism might entail getting rid of large-scale economies, with high internal mobility. What could the path be from here to there?”<sup>360</sup> Reflecting on his party-political experience, Taylor explained how it compelled a change in his approach: “[experience] forces you to think in terms of concrete measures which you

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<sup>354</sup> Blakely, “Radicalizing and De-Radicalizing Charles Taylor,” 689–704.

<sup>355</sup> Fraser, *Dialectics of the Self*, 1–10.

<sup>356</sup> Blakely, “Radicalizing and De-Radicalizing Charles Taylor,” 693. In his earlier monograph Blakely described Taylor as being “knee-deep in the British New Left’s Marxism,” Blakely, *Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and the Demise of Naturalism*, 39.

<sup>357</sup> Jason Blakely, “Three Political Philosophers Debate Social Science: Leo Strauss, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Charles Taylor,” PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2013.

<sup>358</sup> Charles Taylor, “Charles Taylor Responds,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 29, no. 5 (2021): 809–823, 810.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, 811.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*

can hope to see realized.”<sup>361</sup> This can still be in pursuit of radical objectives. “More distant horizons for change are held open but you are concerned with what can be accomplished now.”<sup>362</sup> So, Taylor outlined a manifesto of accomplishable goals for his critics on the radical left, “our future direction of travel ought to be clear”, he wrote:

that we puncture the self-promoting ideologies of neo-liberalism and meritocracy, and replace them with a new and urgent sense of solidarity. And this latter in turn supposes that we overcome the (often tacit) hierarchical discriminations (racial, gender, etc.) that now divide us. And on top of this, *a recovery of the multiple spiritual sources of solidarity*, and a renewed sense of awe and wonder at the natural order which nourishes us. Quite a programme!<sup>363</sup>

Readers with an awareness of Taylor’s political commitments can perceive how his “Reform Master Narrative” in *A Secular Age* seeks to provide the narrative underpinnings for this programme. Taylor went further to reassure those in any doubt about the radicalism of his left-wing commitment—given his long-term view and concern with seemingly marginal issues in the face of inequality—he exhorted his readers,

let’s remember Antonio Gramsci’s: ‘pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will!’ But, just a minute: how about abolishing capitalism? Let’s discuss that later, when the programme outlined above has been successfully implemented...<sup>364</sup>

Considering this, Taylor should be exonerated from his critics on the left, for he confesses to have remained faithful to the radical hope of his youth, but to have changed tack, to a more incremental approach that seeks to advance a revolutionary socialist counterhegemony, after failing to win political power in Canada. Taylor became familiar with Gramsci’s thought through his involvement with the British New Left, and found in Gramsci the theoretical resources to practically address an unclarified point in Marx’s thought—what comes first: freedom from capitalist oppression, or an unalienated sense of

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid. Emphasis added.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 811–812. Ellipsis original.

human solidarity? Following Gramsci, Taylor suggested that this sense of human solidarity should be cultivated to arise organically first, and then that will lead into progressive policy; academia was the vehicle for that subtle project. Upon returning to Oxford in 1976 after the publication of *Hegel*, Taylor's research combined with influential teaching and academic administration. During his five years at All Souls College (1976–1981), he supervised doctoral work by Michael Sandel, Michael Rosen, and Frederick Beiser; they all submitted their dissertations in 1980.<sup>365</sup> Sandel now teaches Government Theory at Harvard University, Rosen is also a Professor of Government at Harvard, and Beiser is Professor of Philosophy at Syracuse University. Sandel's work under Taylor developed a communitarian critique of Rawlsian liberalism, and his later work is continuous with Taylor's agenda. Taylor's Gramscian call that "we puncture the self-promoting ideologies of neo-liberalism and meritocracy," was undertaken by Sandel in *The Tyranny of Merit* (2020).<sup>366</sup>

As Marc Caldwell observed:

Two things remain clear: first, even though his recent and ongoing work in political and moral philosophy (actively discussed in a wide range of fields) today appears to have easily overshadowed his 'Marxist scholarship' that continued long after his return to Canada, these all remain part of the single purpose of Taylor's scholarship. ... when Taylor returned to Oxford in 1976 as Chichele professor of social and political theory...he was regarded foremost as a *Marxist* philosopher.<sup>367</sup>

Taylor's intellectual and political consistency is well-attested in a chorus of secondary literature, and self-evident in his writings. From his formation at McGill in the SCM, through to his provocative writing as the twenty-nine-year-old author of "What's Wrong with Capitalism?" (1960) to his essay for Thomas Douglas, and in his clarion calls through the

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<sup>365</sup> Michael Sandel, "Liberalism and the Problem of the Moral Subject: John Rawls and the Primacy of Justice," D.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1980; Michael Rosen, "The Rationality of Hegel's Dialectic and Its Criticism," D.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1980; Frederick Beiser, "The Spirit of the Phenomenology," D.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1980.

<sup>366</sup> Michael Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit* (London: Penguin Books, 2020).

<sup>367</sup> Marc Caldwell, "Charles Taylor and the pre-History of British Cultural Studies," *Critical Arts*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2009): 342–373, 363. Emphasis original.

*International Journal for Philosophical Studies* on his ninetieth birthday, Taylor's socialism has remained, in Caldwell's words, "part of the single purpose" of his scholarship.<sup>368</sup> By drawing from largely forgotten sources, Taylor has been able to pursue this purpose with discretion and undeniable efficacy. Future considerations of his *oeuvre* must take this aim of his scholarship into account.

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<sup>368</sup> Charles Taylor, "What's Wrong with Capitalism," *New Left Review*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1960): 5–11.

## Chapter Four.

### Historical Theory in *A Secular Age*: From Mimesis to Poiesis

“Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them.”

—Psalm 111:2.

“To redeem what is past, and to transform every ‘It was’ into ‘Thus would I have it!’—that only do I call redemption!”

—Nietzsche ~ *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.<sup>369</sup>

In 1888, Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), the Roman Catholic painter celebrated as the “Father of Modern Art,” spent several months working in Chantilly, a small town twenty-five miles north of Paris. During that time, he produced three variations on the same scene, and painted a view of the town’s *château* perceived at a distance, at the end of a lane that cut through the surrounding forest park. In the second variation of *The Alley at Chantilly*, Cézanne collapsed the geometric space between the viewer and the *château* by distorting the depth of the image with a careful use of hues that flatten the alley into the foliage of the forest. The sight of the *château* then comes into gripping emotional focus, framed and magnified by the trees and their shadows. Cézanne’s insight, according to the existential phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, was that “the lived perspective, that which we actually perceive, is not a geometric or photographic one.”<sup>370</sup>

With these thoughtful and deliberate mimetic distortions, Cézanne’s work crossed the threshold into post-Impressionism. French Impressionists, such as Édouard Manet (1832–1883), Berthe Morisot (1841–1895), and Claude Monet (1840–1926), had sought to

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<sup>369</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common (New York: Random House, 1917), 153.

<sup>370</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Cezanne’s Doubt” in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert Dreyfus and Patricia Dreyfus (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 14.

quickly capture the appearance of a moment *en plein air* with particular attention to the lighting of a scene in the immediacy of their perception. Cézanne's work moved beyond this by integrating the affective dimension of the subject's embodied perception into his artistic representation of the lived moment; this enabled him to chart a new thematic exploration that considered how objects of perceptual significance inflected one's vision. But, in seeking to authentically represent a lived moment of perception, his artistic mimesis took an anti-realist turn. It creatively revelled in the idealist gulf between perception and ontology articulated a hundred years prior by the philosopher from Königsberg, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).<sup>371</sup> For in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant had argued that “the understanding can never overstep the limits of sensibility within which alone objects are given to us. Its principles are merely *rules for the exposition of appearances*; and the proud name of an ontology...must give way to the modest name of a mere analytic of pure understanding.”<sup>372</sup> On this axis—which asserted the primacy of subjective perception against an ontology formulated *a priori*—Kant inaugurated his “Copernican Revolution” in philosophy.<sup>373</sup> Later, one interpreter stated plainly how he thought this revolution had sent Western thought spinning out into the void.<sup>374</sup> For Kant may have believed that he had articulated universal parameters for subjective perception and the exercise of pure reason; yet, as Cézanne's art illustratively contended: subjective understanding and perception are simply not so pure. This “Father of Modern Art” signalled the burgeoning sense that there are no transcendental “*rules for the exposition of appearances*”.

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<sup>371</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Cambridge: Hackett, 1996), 303–322.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 311. Emphasis added.

<sup>373</sup> Joel D. S. Rasmussen, “The Transformation of Metaphysics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Christian Thought*, eds. Joel D. S. Rasmussen, Judith Wolfe, and Johannes Zachhuber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>374</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “How the ‘True World’ Became a Fable” in *The Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (London: T. N. Foulis, 1911), 24–25.

In this way Cézanne’s painting foreshadowed the epistemological developments of the twentieth century, which amounted to the triumph of metaphysical perspectivism. As Merleau-Ponty’s onetime colleague, Jean-Paul Sartre, wrote against Kant in *L’Être et le néant/Being and Nothingness* (1943; trans. 2018), “any attempt to invoke the alleged laws of consciousness, whose articulated sum would be said to constitute its essence, will be futile: a law is a transcendent object of consciousness; it is possible to have consciousness of a law, but not a law of consciousness.”<sup>375</sup> This was a piercing application of his maxim *existence precedes essence* into the heart of Enlightenment rationalism: the ego cannot essentialize “laws of consciousness”. Writing in the philosophical wake of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Sartre believed that the modern subject could not lay sincere claim to the old semiotic fixtures formerly distributed through Western culture (Christendom), and each person was thrown into a chaotic world with neither rational certainty nor naïve confidence concerning fundamental ontology—without a sure governing paradigm, each person existed with an anguish inducing sense of absolute freedom. Nietzsche’s “Parable of the Madman” (1882), declaring the so-called “Death of God” in Europe, was an articulation of this post-Enlightenment sense of the spiritual cataclysm that came with the erasure of the horizon.<sup>376</sup> One consequence of this cataclysmic thought that Sartre and Cézanne engaged in different ways, was that the Platonic–Kantian faith in *transcendental forms* which had guaranteed Western assurances about the existence of a phenomenal/ideal “Truth” known to “Reason” was lost. Pure reason was reduced to a pretence: reason was human reason—mediated through relative, culturally contingent, and socially constructed language—an intellectual guise for an all too human

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<sup>375</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Sarah Richmond (Oxford: Routledge, 2018), 14.

<sup>376</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Joyful Wisdom*, trans. Thomas Common (London: T. N. Foulis, 1910), 167–169.

will to power.<sup>377</sup> Such, Nietzsche argued, were all claims to some transcendental God's-eye view from nowhere; there were only immanent and embodied views from somewhere.<sup>378</sup> This argument suffocated Enlightenment thought like a glass enclosing a lit candle: the light of secular reason burned out, and belief in objective truth was extinguished.<sup>379</sup> Cézanne's art gave expression to the dark romance of the anti-realist creative freedom latent in this emerging worldview.

In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor followed Merleau-Ponty through his analysis of Cézanne's painting, noting his work "to forge a new language, abandoning linear and aerial perspective and making spatial dispositions arise from the modulations of colour."<sup>380</sup> He also perceived how his painting could evoke epiphanic moments for the viewer through the sense of a "gap" between the work of art and the object portrayed.<sup>381</sup> Post-Impressionism was a distinct "move to non-representational art," Taylor recognized, yet it had been generated through the "realist impulse" of Impressionism, which had spurred the longing for "a recovery of lived experience, one of the recurring goals of modern art and twentieth-century philosophy."<sup>382</sup> Taylor's contextual alignment of these developments in twentieth-century art and philosophy is representative of his scholarly approach to intellectual and cultural history generally, but it also implicates him, as a twentieth-century philosopher, and reveals something of his intellectual and vocational self-understanding. His candid admission that *A Secular Age* is an "impressionistic" "sketchy" "story" tracing the

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<sup>377</sup> Johann Hamann, "Metacritique on the Purism of Reason (Written in 1784)," in *Hamann: Writings on Philosophy and Language*, 205–218, ed. Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Hamann was the first writer to offer a metacritique of Kant's epistemology by arguing that (1) all rational arguments were formulated in language, and (2) language was produced within cultures, so (3) it was impossible for "Reason" as such to be transcendent and universal.

<sup>378</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. Thomas Common (London: T. N. Foulis, 1909), 168.

<sup>379</sup> For a different line of reasoning to the same conclusion, see Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (London: Continuum, 2004), 12–13: "The philosophers of the Enlightenment attacked religion in the name of reason; in the end what they killed was not the church but metaphysics and the objective concept of reason itself, the source of power of their own efforts."

<sup>380</sup> *SS*, 468.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*

progression of transformations in modes of awareness, lived experience, and the “pre-ontology” of the Western subject indicates his openness to consider his book as a vast—self-consciously inexact—philosophically engaged work of art: what follows below will argue that this literature is akin to non-representational, post-Impressionist historical writing, existing in the gap between mimesis and poiesis, using smudges and blurs to evoke epiphany with revolutionary socialist political intent.

This chapter develops this argument in three parts: first, it examines the narrative contours and epiphanic aims of Taylor’s “story” in the context of his Socialist Humanism, Axial Theory of World Religions, and critical dialogue with poststructuralist eschewals of the narrative form; part two considers how contemporary trends in critical historical theory (developed by the “neo-Nietzschean Left,” in Taylor’s vocabulary) express anarchistic impulses, within their intellectual-historical setting of Western secularization; finally, part three delineates the example of ecclesiastical history as a contrasting witness to the integration of a Master Narrative with the empirical historical method.

## I

In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor connected “realist painting” with the short-lived but seminal Imagist Movement in modern poetics described by F. S. Flint (1885–1960) and Ezra Pound (1885–1972) in their respective articles, “Imagisme” (1913) and “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” (1913), published in the Chicago-based literary journal, *Poetry*.<sup>383</sup>

Flint’s writing situated the movement with reference to contemporaneous developments in the avantgarde, and somewhat misguidedly described the *imagiste* poetic ideal in terms of “rules”:

The *imagistes* admitted that they were contemporaries of the Post Impressionists and the Futurists; but they had nothing in common

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid. See F. S. Flint, “Imagisme,” *Poetry*, vol. 1, no. 6 (1913): 198–200; Ezra Pound, “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste,” *Poetry*, vol. 1, no. 6 (1913): 200–206.

with these schools. They were not a revolutionary school; their only endeavour was to write in accordance with the best tradition...

They had a few rules...

1. Direct treatment of the “thing,” whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation.<sup>384</sup>

Pound’s comments also stressed economical use of language and stated the *imagiste* aspiration to generate epiphany through precise language, rendering the object described before the reader’s imagination with sublime clarity; he also graciously nuanced Flint’s use of the word “rules”:

An “Image” is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time...It is the presentation of such a “complex” instantaneously which gives that sudden sense of liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art...

To begin with, consider the three rules recorded by Mr. Flint, not as dogma—never consider anything as dogma—but as the result of long contemplation, which, even if it is someone else’s contemplation, may be worth consideration....<sup>385</sup>

Use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something...

[T]he natural object is always the adequate symbol...

Go in fear of abstractions....

Consider the way of the scientists rather than the way of an advertising agent for new soap...

The musician can rely on pitch and the volume of the orchestra. You cannot. The term harmony is misapplied to poetry; it refers to simultaneous sounds of different pitch....

Don’t mess up the perception of one sense by trying to define it in terms of another. This is usually only the result of being too lazy to find the right word...<sup>386</sup>

Taylor also cited the American poet, Amy Lowell (1874–1925), for her description of the movement’s features in her preface to a 1915 anthology of Imagist texts, which outlined a desire to recover “certain common principles” that are “essentials of all great poetry, indeed of all great literature,” but have “fallen into desuetude”:

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<sup>384</sup> Flint, “Imagisme,” 199. These rules are cited in Taylor’s exposition, *SS*, 467.

<sup>385</sup> Cf. *SS*, 467. Drawing his quotations from Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (London: Faber, 1972) and Michael Hamburger, *The Truth of Poetry* (London: Weidenfeld, 1969), Taylor attributes Flint’s comments to Pound.

<sup>386</sup> Pound, “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste,” 200–206.

1. To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the *exact* word, not the nearly exact, nor the merely decorative word...
  
4. To present an image (hence the name: “Imagist”). We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason that we oppose the cosmic poet, who seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art.
5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.<sup>387</sup>

These principles are antipodal to Taylor’s approach in *A Secular Age*, which may aptly be described as a kind of cosmic poetry, as his “Reform Master Narrative” spirals around elements of Western religious history, catching all kinds of spiritual experiences under the self-admittedly “vague,” “very slippery,” and ambiguous umbrella category of engagement with “the transcendent”.<sup>388</sup> Taylor’s concerns regarding sharp literary realism provide guideposts to his own contrasting values; in his critical analysis of the Imagist movement, he noted:

The emphasis was on the hard-edged presentation of the thing, its clear delineation. Instead of being allowed to *interpenetrate as they partake of the same meaning*, the things portrayed are to be sharply circumscribed. They stand out as distinct...Above all, we have to avoid the sloppy modes of thought and perception that make boundaries fluid and allow things to flow into each other. For Pound, if literature had any function for society, it was to contribute this clarity. “When this work goes rotten . . . when the very medium, the very essence of their work, the application of word to thing goes rotten, i.e., becomes slushy and inexact, or excessive and bloated, *the whole machinery of social and individual thought and order goes*

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<sup>387</sup> Amy Lowell, “Preface” in *Some Imagist Poets: An Anthology* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2015), vi–vii.

<sup>388</sup> ASA, 15–16. Taylor established this analytic category in antithetical terms to a more precise approach: On his immanent/transcendent distinction, “One could even argue that marking our particular hard-and-fast distinction here is something which we (Westerners, Latin Christians) alone have done, be it to our intellectual glory or stultification (some of each, I will argue later)...The great invention of the West was that of an immanent order in Nature, whose working could be systematically understood and explained on its own terms, leaving open the question whether this whole order had a deeper significance, and whether, if it did, we should infer a transcendent Creator beyond it. This notion of ‘immanent’ involved denying—or at least isolating and problematizing—any form of *interpenetration* between the things of Nature, on one hand, and ‘the supernatural’ on the other, be this understood in terms of the one transcendent God, or of Gods or spirits, or magic forces, or whatever.” Emphasis added.

*to pot*". The emphasis on clarity and distinctness was in a sense counter-epiphanic in intent.<sup>389</sup>

Three contrasts may be drawn between the principles and aims of Imagist poetics and Taylor's approach to narrating Western religious history in a kind of cosmic poetry. First, Taylor is not attracted to the "hard-edged" description of things at the expense of their "being allowed to interpenetrate as they partake of the same meaning". Such clarity and sharpness of description proscribes a semiotically generous ambiguity—for Taylor, the idea that different linguistic configurations and representations can partake of the same meaning is essential to his pluralist philosophy of religion. His critique of Christian orthodoxy, discussed in chapter seven of this dissertation, specifically finds fault with believers who have a "false confidence in their own hard-edged truths."<sup>390</sup> Second, the political implications of Imagist poetics, and literature's "function for society," are prominent in Taylor's analysis. The *imagistes* were "not a revolutionary school," as Flint recorded, but Taylor's politics are both radical and socialist. His *modus operandi* as a revolutionary cosmic poet inspired by Gramsci can be read through Pound's perception that "slushy and inexact, or excessive and bloated," writing has the tendency to mean that "the whole machinery of social and individual thought and order goes to pot." *A Secular Age* is a destabilizing work that—through its ambiguity and imprecision over the course of eight hundred pages—calls into question the governing social theories and normative epistemological paradigms of Western modernity.<sup>391</sup> Third, Taylor's gloss on the Imagist movement's attitude to epiphany as "counter-epiphanic" was curious given Pound's description of the emancipatory effect of great art in producing a "sudden sense of liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth". Nevertheless, the difference Taylor emphasized was that with post-Impressionism, "[t]here

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<sup>389</sup> *SS*, 467. Emphasis added.

<sup>390</sup> *ASA*, 769.

<sup>391</sup> Cayley and Taylor, "Charles Taylor: The Malaise of Modernity, Part One."

is a self-conscious awareness that what is appearing here isn't to be found reflected through the surface of ordinary things. *The epiphany is of something only indirectly available, something the visible object can't say itself but only nudges us towards.* With the move towards non-representational art, this feature of twentieth-century painting becomes central and obtrusive.<sup>392</sup> In other words, realist painting and literature are counter-epiphanic in the sense that they evoke feeling through the vivid and distinct representation of the thing at the surface level of its appearance; the epiphanic potency of post-Impressionist work lies in its capacity to nudge the viewer towards a deeper sense of the thing, and generate a richer sense of reality by opening up new dimensions of experience and perception for the viewer. Taylor expressed this neatly with the short sentence: "The epiphany is indirect."<sup>393</sup> He was quick to relate this aspect of post-Impressionism to modernist literary trends. "Returning to literature," Taylor explained, "we can see that the counter-epiphanic thrust of the writers I cited wasn't meant to put an end to epiphany. On the contrary, it founds a possibility of a quite new kind. This comes about *through the projection of a frame onto reality.*"<sup>394</sup> So, the epiphany generated by the post-Impressionist artist, through their painting or writing, appears as the artist *projects a frame onto reality* to indirectly nudge their audience towards a new and richer sense of the world. These three contrasting features: (1) semiotic blurring, (2) the intellectually destabilizing effects of imprecise and excessive writing, and (3) the nudging towards indirect epiphany through the meaning of the mimetic distortion that opens a new sense of the world, are displayed in *A Secular Age* where Taylor's story works to project a frame onto Western religious history and contemporary lived experience by (1) blurring experiences of "transcendence" together through a (2) bloated and inexact narrative that (3) leads indirectly by a series of micro-epiphanies into socialist ideology.

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<sup>392</sup> *SS*, 469. Emphasis added. See also, David Kyuman Kim, *Melancholic Freedom: Agency and the Spirit of Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23–82.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

Taylor concluded his discussion of post-Impressionism by observing the bifurcation of the twentieth-century avantgarde in Futurism and Surrealism, which tended towards Fascism and Bolshevism respectively, but originated in a common aspiration to “retrieve experience from the deadening, routinized, conventional forms of instrumental civilization.”<sup>395</sup> Against this modern deadening, the Futurists glorified the surging power of technological control; the Surrealists revelled in the vitalizing energy of unconscious instinct. It is a hallmark of Taylor’s hermeneutic of modernity that he interprets these diverse twentieth-century aesthetic trends, and their associated politics, as dialectical reverberations of eighteenth-century Romantic aspirations.<sup>396</sup> The longed-for harmony of reason and imagination, the individual and society, humanity and nature, connection with the past and vision for the future, lived and experienced as an embodied subject—the hope of realizing these aspirations permeates his story of Western religious history in *A Secular Age*. To generate an epiphanic vision of what this harmony could be, Taylor’s post-Impressionist historical writing blurs the appearance of the past to represent the ostensible truth of its meaning more fully.

For this reason, Taylor self-consciously wrote a “Master Narrative”. *Contra* Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998), he asserted,

we are dealing with... ‘master narratives’, broad framework pictures of how history unfolds. These have come under some considerable attack in our time, and are thought to be (ideally) a thing of the past. But my contention will be that, so far from being passé, these master narratives are essential to our thinking. We all wield them, including those who claim to repudiate them.<sup>397</sup>

Taylor’s engagement with Lyotard is important for two reasons: (1) it was necessary to validate his intention to draw a “broad framework picture” of “how history unfolds” through

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 3–50; Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

<sup>397</sup> ASA, 573.

his own “Reform Master Narrative,” and (2) it was essential for Taylor to maintain his ethical position of Socialist Humanism that he repudiated the kind of moral relativism implicit in Lyotard’s conception of freedom.

Concerning this first idea—that Master Narratives are “broad framework pictures”—it is important to state how the structure of Taylor’s Reform Master Narrative correlates with the “master narratives of spiral form” that he perceived in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century works of Percy Bysshe Shelly (1792–1822), Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), Novalis (1772–1801), Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), and Hegel.<sup>398</sup> As Taylor wrote,

[t]hese master narratives of spiral form...saw an original unity, followed by a division which sets its two terms in opposition: reason versus feeling, humans versus nature, etc. This in turn allowed for a recovered, more complex and richer unity, which resolved the opposition while preserving the terms. Through Hegel, this narrative form was passed on to Marx, and has exerted an immense force in modern history.<sup>399</sup>

The structural parallel can be outlined as follows: Taylor’s Reform Master Narrative begins with a picture of an original unity of life in the “enchanted” world of medieval Europe, then disenchantment occurred through the work of “REFORM” that was born of an instrumental stance to the world. This stance had been adopted in the effort to make “everyone be a *real, 100 percent* Christian” (i.e., bring them into a correct and fuller experience of “enchantment”).<sup>400</sup> Ironically, this work of “REFORM” effected diverse kinds of unintended emancipation and restriction. The recovered, more complex and richer unity, that *A Secular Age* nudges the reader towards is a vision of fullness through liberal enchantment that retains the gains of modernity and recovers a genuine transcendence integrating pluralism, socialism, individual fulfilment, and freedom. His aim was to evoke this epiphany through

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<sup>398</sup> ASA, 315.

<sup>399</sup> ASA, 315.

<sup>400</sup> ASA, 774.

his Master Narrative or “broad framework picture,” by triangulating elements: a paradigmatic vision of social life drawn from the past, a felt sense of loss, and an impression of how this ideal could be restored in modernity. Taylor fully understood the affective influence of all these elements in a Master Narrative: “this sense of loss does not only power a humanist programme of recovery, in for example a future socialist society; it has also fuelled a backward-looking belief that the paradigm lies behind us, sometimes in an ideal Greek polis, sometimes in what was seen as a truly integrated mediaeval society”.<sup>401</sup> Blurred and romanticized visions of former societies and bygone ways of life could exert powerful imaginative force, and were an essential component of Taylor’s “broad framework picture” of Western religious and cultural history: the concept of “enchantment” therefore is the key to both his philosophy of religion and vision of history. Such master narratives and phenomenological descriptions of lived experience do not persuade by making analytic truth claims but by generating fresh senses of the world that can inspire political action. This intuitionist style of argumentation is inherent to Taylor’s definition of Master Narratives:

A Master Narrative is an account which embeds the events it makes sense of within some understanding of the general drift of history. This in turn is intimately linked with a certain view of the gamut of human motivations. Examples are the various Enlightenment stories of progress, the Marxist story, stories of modernity as decadence and loss of moral cohesion, and the like.<sup>402</sup>

In other words, the meaning of the events is projected onto them from the framework that the Master Narrative gives by locating events within its conception of the “general drift of history.” This “drift” is not autonomous but is linked with a certain conception of human motivation. Taylor’s approach to this question of human agency has been a fixture of his intellectual biography from his doctoral work and represents the primary locus of debate between himself and poststructuralists such as Lyotard.

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<sup>401</sup> ASA, 315.

<sup>402</sup> ASA, 818fn27.

This second dimension to the topic of Master Narratives touches the heart of the matter, for it concerns the epistemic legitimacy of Taylor's intuitionist moral realism against the challenge from those he considers "neo-Nietzscheans." Such readers open *Sources of the Self* and find Taylor's hermeneutical-phenomenological explorations in moral philosophy, predicated on "our ineradicable sense that human life is to be respected," somewhat less persuasive.<sup>403</sup> In *A Secular Age*, Taylor developed his hermeneutic phenomenology in broader and more sophisticated terms that sublimate even the will to power:

We all see our lives, and/or the space wherein we live our lives, as having a certain moral/spiritual shape. Somewhere, in some activity, or condition, lies a fullness, a richness; that is, in that place (activity or condition), life is fuller, richer, deeper, more worthwhile, more admirable, more what it should be. This is perhaps a place of power: we often experience this as deeply moving, inspiring.<sup>404</sup>

To readers with literary taste for incisive writing, this appears dismally vague. However even the moral outlook of a neo-Nietzschean would get tangled in this rhetoric—and that is the more important point. Once the reader understands that Taylor's hermeneutical phenomenology is trying to be maximally all-encompassing—catching and blurring experiences of "transcendence" together to project a common meaning onto them through his Master Narrative—this style can be appreciated as a means of generating a new set of universal moral intuitions. As Taylor explained, "I am repeating what I attempted in *Sources of the Self*, which also took up a set of issues of universal human concern, but dealt with them within a regional compass."<sup>405</sup> The ethical dialogue with "neo-Nietzscheans" such as Lyotard was more polemical in *Sources of the Self*, where Taylor wrote, "[t]he very claim not to be orientated by a notion of the good is one which seems to me incredible, for reasons

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<sup>403</sup> SS, 8. Michael Shapiro, "Charles Taylor's Moral Subject: Philosophical Papers, Volumes 1 and 2," *Political Theory*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1986): 311–324; Mark Redhead, "Charles Taylor's Nietzschean Predicament: A Dilemma More Self-Revealing than Foreboding," *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, vol. 27, no. 6 (2001): 81–106.

<sup>404</sup> ASA, 5.

<sup>405</sup> ASA, 22.

outlined in the first part of this book.”<sup>406</sup> This dispute amplified the essential intertwining of a morally realist judgement concerning the “gamut of human motivations” and the formation of a Master Narrative; Taylor’s engagement with Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida, perceived their prizing of “the most pervasive, of all modern goods,” at the centre of their thought, “unconstrained freedom.”<sup>407</sup> This competing value represented a challenge to Taylor’s Socialist Humanism through its capacity to energize both degenerative individualism and anti-humanist tendencies. “To the extent that this kind of freedom is held up as the essence of ‘post-modernity’, as it is by Jean-François Lyotard,” Taylor argued, “it shows itself to be a prolongation of the least impressive side of modernism.”<sup>408</sup> Calling it a prolongation of modernism, Taylor rejected the notion of some postmodern rupture in Western subjectivity and interpreted the “spiritual profile” of Lyotard’s work as “an overelaborated boost” to the excessive Romanticism that drove both Futurism and Surrealism “in the name of unrestricted freedom.”<sup>409</sup> Taylor also argued that “[t]he work of Derrida and Foucault, albeit weightier—in Foucault’s case, incomparably so—also fits within this...profile. They offer charters for subjectivism and the celebration of our own creative power at the cost of occluding what is spiritually arresting in this whole movement of modern culture.”<sup>410</sup> Foreshadowing his approach in *A Secular Age*, Taylor’s hermeneutic worked to sublimate their insights into his implicit master narrative (their emphases on subjectivity and creative power are modern gains; the anti-social individualist and anti-humanist tendencies of their thought are negatives born of spiritual closure); Lyotard’s assault on the credibility of master narratives *per se*, however, could only be dismissed.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> SS, 489

<sup>407</sup> SS, 489.

<sup>408</sup> SS, 489.

<sup>409</sup> SS, 489.

<sup>410</sup> SS, 490.

<sup>411</sup> See ASA, 716–717: “It is the claim of a certain trendy ‘post-modernism’ that the age of Grand Narratives is over, that we cannot believe in these any more. But their demise is the more obviously exaggerated in that the post-modern writers themselves are making use of the same trope in declaring the reign of narratives ended:

The force of Lyotard's argument is more serious than Taylor's caricature and dismissal permits. The occasion of his writing, indicated in the subtitle of *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir/ The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979; trans. 1984), was to provide a philosophical assessment of the computerization of knowledge and its implications, with a focus on higher education.<sup>412</sup> Lyotard's prescient examination of the emerging data economy, and his prediction that multinational corporations owning vast amounts of data would possess more wealth and power than small countries was an accurate judgement, impressively reasoned by an author writing in the late 1970s.<sup>413</sup> Examining this transformation in material conditions from his Marxist background, Lyotard's consideration of the twentieth-century sense of "incredulity towards metanarratives" noted declining enthusiasm for "the old poles of attraction," e.g. nation states and political parties.<sup>414</sup> Church attendance declined rapidly in the late twentieth century, but so did enrolment in the army and the trade unions; attached to these institutions were master narratives of nationalism, salvation history, and Marxism. Lyotard's post-Marxist intellectual trajectory parted with Taylor's Socialist Humanist optimism because it lacked the resources—that Taylor found in his philosophy of religion—to sustain hope in the prospect of unalienated solidarity after the possibility of universal intellectual coherence was definitively undermined by pluralism and the legitimation crisis posed by the computerization of knowledge. One aspect of this postmodern condition is technological saturation in a plurality of narratives that relativise and undermine each other, including Marxism. "Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside? The operativity criterion

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ONCE we were into grand stories, but NOW we have realized their emptiness and we proceed to the next stage. This is a familiar refrain."

<sup>412</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), xxiii–xxv. Lyotard later said that his knowledge was "less than limited" when he undertook this task, and the text was "simply the worst of my books" nevertheless it did articulate some impactful insights, see Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998), 26.

<sup>413</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 5–6.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv, 14.

is technological; it has no relevance for judging what is true or just.”<sup>415</sup> The view of the future that therefore dominated Lyotard and Foucault’s atheistic imaginations, was an anti-humanist technological determinism where amoral forces of instrumental reason relativised humanity into oblivion.<sup>416</sup> Taylor addressed these themes carefully in his account of Western modernity. Bypassing the technological emphasis, he approached the topic of pluralism through a phenomenology of life in globalized society and what he called “the nova effect” to describe the rapidly expanding variety of paths to “fullness” taken by modern subjects in the “Age of Authenticity” that gave them the freedom to “do their own thing.”<sup>417</sup> Against the poststructuralist reading, modern freedom and pluralism are sublimated and unified in new approach to “transcendence” through Taylor’s Master Narrative. Sharing the perception of an anti-humanist thrust to instrumental reason, Taylor placed this form of rationality at the centre of his critical genealogy of Western secularization. Drawing close to Foucault, Taylor’s exposition of “The Rise of the Disciplinary Society” located its origins in the demand of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) that the laity confess their sins annually to a priest—a crucial element in the *History of Sexuality*. The distinctive feature of Taylor’s account, in contrast with the outlooks expressed by Lyotard and Foucault, was that these elements (an optimistic reading of pluralism, and a critique of instrumental rationality) were integrated in his philosophy of religion as it was drawn from Karl Jaspers and the Axial Theory of World Religions. This was the philosophy of religion that “lurks in the shadows” of *A Secular Age*, as Milbank put it.<sup>418</sup> Jaspers argued that there was a global revolution in humanity’s religiosity between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC that wrought new religious

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid., xxiv–xxv.

<sup>416</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity, 1991); Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002), 407–422; cf. Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 56.

<sup>417</sup> ASA, 300.

<sup>418</sup> Milbank, “A Closer Walk on the Wild Side,” 95.

concerns—such as a focus on transcendent conceptions justice—and these were articulated “almost simultaneously” in diverse geographic contexts from Plato to the Hebrew Prophets to Confucius. This theory has been criticized by Diarmaid MacCulloch and Iain Provan.<sup>419</sup> It is not insignificant that it was formulated by a German intellectual in the aftermath of the Second World War. Sensing the dawn of globalization with mass transit and emergent communications technologies, Jaspers sought to articulate a post-Christian and more inclusive vision of global religious history. As he put it,

In the Western World the philosophy of history was founded in the Christian faith. In a grandiose series of works from St. Augustine to Hegel...All history goes toward and comes from Christ. The appearance of the Son of God is the axis of world history. But the Christian faith is only one faith, not the faith of mankind. This view of universal history suffers from the defect that it can only be valid for believing Christians...An axis of world history, if such a thing exists, would have to be discovered empirically, as a fact capable of being accepted as such by all men, Christians included.<sup>420</sup>

To promote multicultural coexistence, Jaspers sought to tilt the axis of world history away from Christology and onto a vague and broad collection of ethical insights that occurred to humanity “almost simultaneously” across a 500-year period. MacCulloch therefore called this thesis an “optical illusion”.<sup>421</sup> Taylor drew on Jaspers to relate his critique of modern Western liberalism and capitalism through individualism back to the Axial Revolution. Taylor argued that Buddhism, Christianity, Stoicism, and Islam “are the classic steps in the Axial Revolution, on one hand,” which underlie and support “the rise of the modern social imaginary on the other, [which] brings into existence a different kind of individualism.”<sup>422</sup> Namely, the rights-based individualism articulated by social contract theorists, which is the philosophical-anthropological foundation of modern Western economic and political life.

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<sup>419</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, “The Axis of Goodness,” *The Guardian*, 18 March 2006; Ian Provan, *Convenient Myths: The Axial Age, Dark Green Religion, and the World that Never Was* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013).

<sup>420</sup> Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, 8.

<sup>421</sup> MacCulloch, “The Axis of Goodness.”

<sup>422</sup> ASA, 578.

Taylor cited the French anthropologist Louis Dumont (1911–1988) to develop his argument: “[the] Axial moves were the charter for what Dumont calls” the idea of the-individual-outside-the-world. For after the Axial Revolution, the “Bhikkhu, the monk, the sanyassin, the Sufi saint steps outside the regular order of what still remains a hierarchical society.”<sup>423</sup> So, the Axial Revolution created this capacity and energised this ability for religious people to form an autonomous identity outside of the hierarchical order of society. Then, following Dumont again, Taylor argued this was foundational for the modern shift towards the idea of the-individual-in-the-world. For in Western modernity, “the social ‘world’ is now seen as made up of individuals, which associate for mutual benefit.”<sup>424</sup> But the notion of the autonomous individual living in freedom was produced by the Axial Revolution.

This is essential context for Taylor’s “Reform Master Narrative”. His overarching thesis in *A Secular Age* is that Reform engenders secularity. As he put it in the epilogue, Reform “strives to end the post-Axial equilibrium, that is, the balance and complementarity between pre- and post-Axial elements in all higher civilizations.”<sup>425</sup> In other words, Reform strived to eliminate traces of paganism or more primordial, less transcendent religion; Reform sought religious purification: in the Western context, this meant, to quote Taylor, “Reform demanded that everyone be a *real, 100 percent* Christian. Reform not only disenchantments but it re-orders life and society.”<sup>426</sup>

Taylor’s analysis of medieval piety illustrates this hermeneutic. According to Taylor, “the years after 1000 see the steady growth of a widely popular, specifically Christocentric spirituality,” he wrote, “focussed on the suffering humanity of Jesus; which we can see in religious art [and] in practices of identification with his suffering”.<sup>427</sup> Taylor argued that

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<sup>423</sup> ASA, 578.

<sup>424</sup> ASA, 578.

<sup>425</sup> ASA, 774.

<sup>426</sup> ASA, 774. Emphasis original.

<sup>427</sup> ASA, 64.

there was a concomitant increase in lay anxiety regarding death; following Eamon Duffy, he related this to a surge of interest in relics and purgatory to assuage those fears.<sup>428</sup> Taylor identified these changes in devotional emphasis as “autonomous changes in popular piety”, which then spurred a Reformist dialectic.<sup>429</sup> As Taylor put it, “[t]he practices may still have been different from those of certain elites...[but] this difference in practice becomes problematic in the centuries before the climacteric of the early 1500s.”<sup>430</sup> So, as early as the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, with its decree that the laity must confess their sins to a priest annually, Taylor discerned “concerted efforts on the part of the hierarchical-clerical church...to raise standards...an effort to align the masses on the religion of the elites.”<sup>431</sup> In Taylor’s account, it was the progressive concatenation of this dialectical move from elites to systematically impose truth and ethical ideals on the masses that was the engine that created modern secularity. For Taylor, Christology was at the heart of this process. Following Louis Dupré (1925–2022), he suggested that this “intense focus on the person of Jesus Christ...ends up opening ‘a new perspective on the unique particularity of the person.’”<sup>432</sup> “On an intellectual level,” Taylor claimed, “this takes time to work itself out in the writings of great Franciscan thinkers... [such as] Scotus, [and] Occam, but it ends up giving a new status to the particular as something more than a mere instantiation of the universal.”<sup>433</sup> And ultimately, according to Taylor, this Christocentric piety created the picture of the world as “a vast field of mutually affecting parts.”<sup>434</sup> Which, he claimed, dovetailed with the instrumental stance towards society adopted by religious reformers. In sum: the Christocentric piety of the Middle Ages led to the nominalism of Scotus and

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<sup>428</sup> ASA, 64–65.

<sup>429</sup> ASA, 85.

<sup>430</sup> ASA, 64.

<sup>431</sup> ASA, 64.

<sup>432</sup> ASA, 94.

<sup>433</sup> ASA, 94.

<sup>434</sup> ASA, 98.

Ockham, which led to the atomistic/mechanistic world picture, which aligned with and accelerated post-Axial individualism, produced social contract theory, ultimately underpinning political liberalism and economic capitalism—ideologies which finally enable and promote Western unbelief: who could have thought “fixing your eyes on Jesus” might have such unintended consequences. This is where Hegel’s influence on Taylor’s Christology is apparent. “Though it couldn’t be clear at the time,” Taylor wrote, “we with hindsight can recognize this as a major turning point in the history of Western civilization, an important step towards that primacy of the individual which defines our culture.”<sup>435</sup> The nature of this turning point “was primarily a revolution in devotion,” Taylor explained, “in the focus of prayer and love: the paradigm human individual, the God-man, in relation to whom alone the humanity of all the others can be truly known, begins to emerge more into the light.”<sup>436</sup> This was an attenuation of Hegel’s Christology: in his 1975 exposition, Taylor observed that in Hegel’s system of absolute idealism, “this point [a preliminary stage of Absolute Spirit’s rational self-awareness] could only be made through the appearance of a unique God-man.”<sup>437</sup> “In the fulness of speculative thought,” Taylor explained, “we can now grasp the truth that God is identical with each man, and yet non-identical with him as his particularity fails to match the universal nature of God. But at the stage at which men then were, the unity of God and man had to be presented in immediate sensible intuition.”<sup>438</sup> In other words, the incarnation was meant to indicate the connection between Absolute Spirit and human subjectivity by means of religious representation as a precursor to philosophical knowledge of this connection.

Another attenuated parallel of Hegel’s system with Taylor’s story is the idea of the consummation of *Geist* in community. “The central tenets of this philosophy, that the only

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<sup>435</sup> ASA, 94.

<sup>436</sup> ASA, 94.

<sup>437</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 209.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*

locus of God's life as spirit is man, and that this spiritual life is nothing but the unfolding of conceptual necessity, together rule out the kind of freedom of God to which faith relates" Taylor wrote critically of Hegel.<sup>439</sup> There is a parallel, however, for in Taylor's Master Narrative, as chapter seven shows, there is an aspiration to cultivate an intuition of "the communion of saints, to which we are all connected" and in which "the spiritual is always incarnate."<sup>440</sup> For Taylor, however, the coming of this community is a vision he compellingly expresses through his Master Narrative not as a matter of conceptual necessity but Romantic and poetic hope. This philosophy of religion is explored in chapter seven, but the next section below studies the challenge posed by those on Taylor's neo-Nietzschean left who do not place their hope in collective progress arising organically but perceive a vital need for a work of destruction.

## II

There is a critical and "eerie" intellectual trajectory emerging from the pages of *History and Theory*.<sup>441</sup> The journal's editor in chief, Ethan Kleinberg, recently published *Haunting History* (2017) to advocate "a deconstructive approach to the past." Following Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), Kleinberg wants to deconstruct historical ontology itself—deny the fixed stability of past events, and instead write history that is useful for life.<sup>442</sup> Joan Scott, a member of the Journal's editorial committee, shares this vision for a practical past with Kleinberg. Her book, *Sex and Secularism* (2017), seeks to destabilize the masculine term "Secular" by revealing how it now functions discursively against its feminine counterpart: "Islam".<sup>443</sup> Her polemical assault criticizes *A Secular Age* for its "progressive narrative of

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 493.

<sup>440</sup> ASA, 751.

<sup>441</sup> Shazad Bashir, "Introduction," *History and Theory*, vol. 58, no. 4 (2019): 3–6, 4: "Creating a historical narrative is thus akin to channeling ghosts from the past into the present."

<sup>442</sup> Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 1–3.

<sup>443</sup> Joan Scott, *Sex and Secularism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

secularism” that inappropriately assumes “an idealised or reified notion of secularism as a transcendent phenomenon”.<sup>444</sup> Scott’s poststructuralist aversion to ontological fixity, and her abiding historical interest in the manifestations of power relations, have been trademarks of her career; most influentially articulated in her 1986 article, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”.<sup>445</sup> Thirty-two years later, *Sex and Secularism* combines these commitments in a work of critical history that attempts to lay bare the Islamophobia and “Christian racial and religious superiority” implicit in “Secularism,” along with the gender inequality “at its very heart.”<sup>446</sup> Behind this lies Scott’s desire for “us to think otherwise about the relationship of past to present” in order to “realise more just and egalitarian futures”—though her conception of justice is highly innovative.<sup>447</sup> In May 2018, Kleinberg and Scott, along with Gary Wilder, launched the “Theory Revolt” movement, publishing their manifesto independently online.<sup>448</sup> They called for historical writing to become “*Critical history*” that “*aims to understand the existing world in order to question the givens of our present so as to create openings for other possible worlds.*”<sup>449</sup> Here they channel the thoughts of Hayden White (1928–2018), Michel Foucault (1926–1984), and Friedrich Nietzsche. For in their theoretical re-conjurations, Kleinberg et al are praying for the intellectual revolution that will finally overthrow historicism. “O Clio, we enlist your ear. Listen, please, to our voices of rage. With these theses on Theory and History we invite you to sanctify our mission and to commend us to the gods.”<sup>450</sup> Their “rage” lies in the fact that “*Academic history has never managed to transcend its eighteenth century origins as an*

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid., 5–6.

<sup>445</sup> Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–1075.

<sup>446</sup> Scott, *Sex and Secularism*, 3–4.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>448</sup> Ethan Kleinberg, Joan Scott, and Gary Wilder, (2018). “Theses on Theory and History,” *Theory Revolt*, <https://historyandtheory.org/theoryrevolt>. In April 2020 their proposal was published in *History of the Present*: Ethan Kleinberg, Joan Scott, and Gary Wilder, “Theses on Theory and History,” *History of the Present*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2020): 157–165.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., III.10. Emphasis original.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid.

*empiricist enterprise.*<sup>451</sup> This is because the orthodox historical method has an “unquestioned allegiance to ‘ontological realism.’”<sup>452</sup> To tear down this metaphysical “allegiance,” they tugged on the public commitment made by the *American Historical Review* in February 2018 to “decolonise” itself.<sup>453</sup> They charged the journal’s editor to rethink “the scholarly norms and forms of knowledge that have enabled the kind of exclusions in which the *AHR* has long participated. By focusing exclusively on sociologically diverse authors and geographically diverse topics,” they argued, “*empiricist methodology and realist epistemology will remain in place as the unquestioned disciplinary ground.*”<sup>454</sup> The June 2018 issue of the *AHR* announced that Alex Lichtenstein and Kate Brown had, in a deliberately chosen phrase, “dreamed up” a new section of the journal: “History Unclassified.”<sup>455</sup> This new section welcomes “research experiences that raise new methodological questions.”<sup>456</sup> It is also “open to historical writing and presentation in new formats, and to literary explorations of new epistemologies derived from emergent technologies.”<sup>457</sup> This vision has been drawn from Kleinberg’s *Haunting History*: “The discipline of history is facing a paradigm shift, and historians whose mind-sets were formed and constrained by print must now confront the changes that digital media makes in every aspect of their discipline.”<sup>458</sup> Kleinberg’s “gamble” is that the technological innovations of the last twenty years represent an irreversible transition into a new epistemē.<sup>459</sup> Emergent technologies should create more than e-books; Kleinberg argues they will transform our historical consciousness. He believes that this has already happened to a generation of young

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid., I.1. Emphasis original.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., I.4.

<sup>453</sup> Alex Lichtenstein, “Decolonizing the *AHR*,” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 123 no. 1 (2018): xiv–xvii.

<sup>454</sup> Kleinberg, Scott, and Wilder, *Theses on Theory and History*, I.6. Emphasis added.

<sup>455</sup> *AHR* Editors, “What Form Can History Take Today? New Voices in the *AHR*,” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 123, no. 3 (2018): viii.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid.

<sup>458</sup> Kleinberg, *Haunting History*, 129.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid., 24.

people who have grown up engaging with multiple forms of media at the same time for on average six hours a day.<sup>460</sup> Following Katherine Hayles, he believes that this generation has been neurologically reconditioned; having jettisoned the capacity for deep attention that reinforces ontological realism, and cultivated a new form of hyper attention that dovetails with “a heterogeneous logic of multiplicity... a polysemic logic of alterity that embraces and accepts difference.”<sup>461</sup> He explains that whilst “[t]he singular logic of deep attention correlates to the ontological realist approach to history...the polysemic logic of hyper attention correlates to the deconstructive one.”<sup>462</sup> When applied to the philosophy of history, the polysemic logic of deconstructive historical writing truly represents a paradigm shift. Instead of ontological realism and an absolutist philosophy of time, “we are talking about the multiply [sic] heterogeneous iterations of a narrative form that does not unfold in a strict linear fashion but is threaded through itself in a nonlinear polysemic topology...[this is] how we should think of the hauntology of the past”.<sup>463</sup> Thus the editor in chief of *History and Theory* has a bold vision for the future of historical writing: a multiplicity of narratives along multiple temporalities, none of which are authoritative—a deconstructed past, and finally a non-metaphysical history. This vision is at the helm of *History and Theory*, and its “postcolonial” advocates are now annexing sections of the *American Historical Review*.

In an article published in March 2020, Torbjörn Chorell stressed Kleinberg’s intellectual debt to Hayden White, and argued that the fundamental trait shared by both writers was/is their will to complete the secularization of history.<sup>464</sup> To contextualize this argument, Chorell drew from Karl Löwith’s *Meaning in History* (1949), which argued that

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>462</sup> Katherine Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

<sup>463</sup> Kleinberg, *Haunting History*, 132.

<sup>464</sup> Torbjörn Chorell, “Incomplete Secularization of History: Ethan Kleinberg and Hayden White,” *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2020): 27–46.

modern philosophies of history are ultimately secularized variants of Christian eschatology, resting on Christian teleological assumptions.<sup>465</sup> According to Chorell, White believed this and was frustrated that historical writing “retains structures of thinking that do not accord with the secular human condition.”<sup>466</sup> For “[h]e was convinced that we lived in a disenchanted world without redemption.”<sup>467</sup> Chorell suggests that this frustration, that modern historical writing did not cohere with modern atheism, inspired White’s profound denial of the historical discipline’s claims to epistemological and narrative “realism” in *Metahistory* (1973), where he redefined the past as the historical field, the site of the historian’s poetic configurations of historical “data”.<sup>468</sup> His objective was to relativize the ironic approach to historical writing that was common to all historicists, and lay behind the “crisis of historicism.” With ironic claims to historical “science” supporting “real” narratives relativized as protoscientific at best and undeniably conceptualized at the level of precritical ideological commitment, White hoped to clear the way for the recovery of a practical past.<sup>469</sup> Paul Herman observes that in the 1960s White was especially concerned with “the ‘problems peculiar to our own time’” and hoped that historians could once again act like the great historical writers of the nineteenth century, as “mediators ‘between past and future...’”<sup>470</sup> The suggestion first made by Hans Kellner was reiterated and developed by Chorell, that White pursued a direct confrontation with the problem of meaninglessness inherent in modern atheism, but in an existentialist spirit that sought the creation of meanings in a practical history, “liberated from myth, religion and metaphysics.”<sup>471</sup> Hence in his last book,

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<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 29–30.

<sup>466</sup> Chorell, “Incomplete Secularisation of History,” 30.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>468</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 30–31.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid., xii, 21, 26, 41, 434.

<sup>470</sup> Paul Herman, *Hayden White: The Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 37–38. See also, Karyn Ball, “Hayden White’s Hope, or the Politics of Prefiguration,” in *Philosophy of History after Hayden White*, 89–108, ed. Robert Doran (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 90.

<sup>471</sup> White, *Metahistory*, 20; Hans Kellner, “A Bedrock of Order: Hayden White’s Linguistic Humanism,” *History and Theory*, vol. 19, no. 4 (1980): 1–29; Richard Vann, “The Reception of Hayden White.” *History*

*The Practical Past* (2014), White criticized the working assumptions of modern historians—that studying evidence of the past in the present can yield knowledge of the relationships between things in reality—as “too metaphysically idealistic to be credited in modernity.”<sup>472</sup> This is Kleinberg’s critique as well; but where White wrote about the “possibility of scientific knowledge of the ‘historical past,’” Kleinberg presses on to the ontological argument.<sup>473</sup> He targets the philosophical position “that most conventional historians hold,” namely the “weaker variant” of ontological realism.<sup>474</sup> In this position, “the historian accepts that there is a possibility for epistemological uncertainty about our understanding of a past event, but this is mitigated by the ontological certainty that the event happened in a certain way at a certain time.”<sup>475</sup> But Kleinberg argues that if we can have no epistemological certainty about the event, then our ontological certainty about its nature is without rational warrant. Hence he describes historical revision in extreme terms that few historians accept: “[e]very archive is necessarily incomplete, and any addition to it in the future *changes the past*.”<sup>476</sup> This is because Kleinberg’s deconstructive project to rid history of metaphysics collapses historical ontology into epistemology: there is no past but the one(s) we think we know based on its latent ontology in the present, for there is only an unstable present and absolutely nothing beyond or outside it. This contentious argument seemingly wishes to render history metaphysically consistent with atheism, and Kleinberg presses his point forcefully against those historians who might resist this move: “what” then, “holds the ontological certainty of the past event given the possibility of epistemological uncertainty in recounting that event?”<sup>477</sup> Kleinberg is animated by the fact that though a supposedly

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*and Theory*, vol. 37, no. 2 (1998): 143–161, 144; Chorell, “Incomplete Secularization of History,” 27; Hayden White, “The Burden of History,” *History and Theory*, vol. 5 no. 2 (1966): 111–134, 134.

<sup>472</sup> Hayden White, *The Practical Past* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014), xi.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>474</sup> Kleinberg, *Haunting History*, 1.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid.*, 9. Emphasis added.

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

secularized variant of historicism reigns as academic dogma, historicism—with its philosophical commitments to ontological and epistemological realism—remains theoretically indebted to a theological assumption that God holds the past.<sup>478</sup> For it was this assumption that enabled the Protestant theologian Johann Chladenius (1710–1759) to initially conceive of historicism in his lectures on ecclesiastical history, and historians have never re-theorized and replaced this theological foundation, they have merely ignored it; and therefore Kleinberg wants “to expose the limitations of that model to our current intellectual milieu.”<sup>479</sup> Like White, it appears Kleinberg seeks an approach to historical writing more appropriate for a secular age: a nominally secularized historicism is inadequate. For historical theory to finally transcend theology and complete its secularization, the “Theory Revolt” must be radical: historians must deconstruct the past itself to rid history of theology.

It is interesting that Kleinberg does not engage with historians whose commitment to ontological realism is warranted by their Christian faith, but instead exhorts secular historicists to follow through on their secularity. Yet to this latter audience, Kleinberg’s conclusions remain radical, perhaps even intuitively wrong. The “Cambridge School” of intellectual history for instance, might hesitate to deny the fixed reality of past events, but the principal figure in this school, Quentin Skinner, wields indubitable secularist credentials.<sup>480</sup> After all, Skinner wrote a twenty-page review attacking Charles Taylor for how his theism inflected *Sources of the Self*.<sup>481</sup> Evidently historians can remain secularists,

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<sup>478</sup> Ibid., 11; Frederick Beiser, “Chladenius and the New Science of History,” in *The German Historicist Tradition* 27–62 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 28, 41–43.

<sup>479</sup> Kleinberg, *Haunting History*, 11; Sturm, T. (2010). “Chladenius, Johann Martin (1710–1759),” in (eds) Klemme, H. & Kuehn, M. *The Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century German Philosophers*. Continuum. Sturm notes that at the heart of Chladenius’s conception of historicism was his doctrine: “History is one; however, the representations of it are numerous and manifold.” Kleinberg wishes to resist Chladenius at the point where he, as Sturm observes, “assumes that there is an underlying unity of history—history as the object of our narrations, not the narrations themselves.”

<sup>480</sup> Paul Herman and Ethan Kleinberg published an exchange debating whether John Pocock is an ontological realist. See, Paul Herman and Ethan Kleinberg, “Are Historians Ontological Realists? An Exchange,” *Rethinking History*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2018): 546–557.

<sup>481</sup> Quentin Skinner, “Who are we? Ambiguities of the Modern Self,” *Inquiry*, no 34, 133–153.

and actively pursue the secularization of history, without compromising their faith in the scientific nature of their historical method. Drawing from Taylor's *A Catholic Modernity?* (1997), which contrasted secular humanists with neo-Nietzscheans, it is also possible to contrast secular historicists with neo-Nietzscheans.<sup>482</sup>

Secular historicists: intellectual descendants of Edward Gibbon (1737–1794) and David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874), Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) and Max Weber (1864–1920), whose work can be understood as a kind of “Enlightened Scientific History.” The adjective “Enlightened” relates to the nature of their secularity, which is rooted in arguments against the rationality of faith in miracles, and a progressive narrative of secularization that believes humanity has “outgrown” religion, combined with a metaphysical naturalism based on confidence in the ultimate explanatory power of the natural sciences. Hence the adjective “Scientific,” which stresses the secular historicists’ conception of history as an autonomous discipline, based on their faith in the capacity of the empirical historical method to yield accurate knowledge about the past, and their foundational assumption of ontological realism. There is a pattern to “Neo-Nietzschean” thought insofar as it began with Nietzsche, who criticized Strauss, and runs through Foucault, Derrida, and White to Kleinberg, who now criticizes Pocock.<sup>483</sup> At the heart of this critical outlook is Nietzsche’s will to confront the nihilism inherent in a modern culture where, his “madman” declares, “God is dead.” This promulgation from *The Gay Science* (1887) was followed with questions probing its implications: “Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What did we do when we loosened this earth from its sun?...Is there still an above and below?”<sup>484</sup> Or as Walter Kaufmann paraphrases

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<sup>482</sup> Taylor *A Catholic Modernity?*

<sup>483</sup> For Nietzsche’s criticism of Strauss, see “David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer,” in Friedrich Nietzsche, Breazeale, D., and Hollingdale, R., *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–56. For Kleinberg’s criticism of Pocock, see *Haunting History*, 43–55.

<sup>484</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Thomas Common (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 2012), 149–150.

Nietzsche's view materially, "[t]here remains only the void. We are falling. Our dignity is gone. Our values are lost. Who is to say what is up and what is down?"<sup>485</sup> Hence Nietzsche's philosophy aimed towards the "revaluation of all values."<sup>486</sup> His revaluation of truth is what distinguishes neo-Nietzscheans from secular historicists. In *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), Nietzsche laid out his criticism of atheists who grounded their unbelief in intellectual idealism or science: "these pale atheists, Antichrists, immoralists, nihilists, these sceptics... These are very far from being *free spirits*: *because they still believe in truth...*"<sup>487</sup> Thus he splinters off from secular conceptions of "scientific" history, and with indirect subtlety attacks Strauss's vision of a presuppositionless history: "[s]trictly speaking, there is no 'presuppositionless' knowledge..." he cites *The Gay Science* to illustrate this point, for "faith in science presupposes, *thus affirms another world* from the one of life, nature and history..."<sup>488</sup> Determined to only affirm that which "is" in his revaluation of values, Nietzsche could not commit to the metaphysical idealism implicit in "scientific" history: "Our faith in science is still based on a *metaphysical faith*, — even we knowers of today, we godless anti-metaphysicians, still take *our* fire from the blaze set alight by a faith thousands of years old, that faith of the Christians, which was also Plato's faith, that God is truth, that truth is *divine*..."<sup>489</sup> An appropriate revaluation of truth for a secular age could not yield truth an absolute and intrinsically unquestionable status. To acknowledge the existence of an absolute truth was to acknowledge "another world" beyond life, nature, and history; whilst to confess—logically—that truth cannot be criticized, was to render truth divine, and the "divinity" of truth renders humanity subordinate to something immaterial and

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<sup>485</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 97.

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>487</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *'On the Genealogy of Morality' and Other Writings*, trans. Carol Diethe, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 114.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*, 114–115.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*, 115. Emphasis original.

transcendent. Hence Nietzsche's critique of secular historicists—they think they are “free spirits”, but they still submit to truth and hold a metaphysical faith in the possibility of scientific knowledge of the past; craving “objectivity” they are servile: historiographically powerless. Due to their metaphysical naturalism, their work “rejects all teleology” and “scorns playing the judge,” but this means that it “affirms as little as it denies, it asserts and ‘describes’.”<sup>490</sup> This history modelled exclusively on the natural sciences is inevitably meaningless. For just as the observations of the natural sciences have no “meaning,” the findings of historical “science” have no meaning either. Thus Nietzsche's verdict over secular historicism: “All this is ascetic to a high degree; but to an even higher degree it is *nihilistic*, make no mistake about it!”<sup>491</sup> Striving to deny metaphysical faith and reach beyond nihilism, Nietzsche's own philosophy of history hinges on his conception of the relationship between life and knowledge: “Is life to dominate knowledge and science, or is knowledge to dominate life?”<sup>492</sup> For Nietzsche, “life” ought to dominate science, and so “we want to serve history only to the extent that history serves life.”<sup>493</sup> He conceived three modes of history possibly “useful” for life: monumental, antiquarian, and critical.<sup>494</sup> It is the critical mode that the “Theory Revolt” is presently rallying round. Nietzsche offered this mode as “a history that judges and condemns.”<sup>495</sup> It is useful for anyone “who is oppressed by a present need, and who wants to throw off this burden at any cost”.<sup>496</sup> It allows the historian to “break up and dissolve a part of the past: he does this by bringing it before the tribunal, scrupulously examining it and finally condemning it.”<sup>497</sup> The means of critical examination, the historiographical antechamber to cultural condemnation, has expanded to include the

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<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, 118–119.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>492</sup> Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life” in *Untimely Meditations*, 120.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*, 75–76.

study of power relations and deconstruction, along with genealogy. The anti-metaphysical premises behind these critical methods enables them to relativize or destroy any ontology. For they are designed to make clear “how unjust the existence of anything—a privilege, a caste, a dynasty for example—is, and how greatly this thing deserves to perish. Then the past is regarded critically, then one takes the knife to its roots, then one cruelly tramples over every kind of piety.”<sup>498</sup> Following in Nietzsche’s footsteps, Foucault did this to sexuality, and Scott likewise to the relationship between sex and gender. Nietzsche’s dreadful confession is that when the examination is complete and the condemnation is given: “[i]t is not justice which here sits in judgement; it is even less mercy which pronounces the verdict: it is life alone, that dark, driving power that insatiably thirsts for itself.”<sup>499</sup> Perhaps “highly innovative” was too ambiguous a description of Scott’s idea of justice. For this philosophy of history conceives of “life” as a “dark” will to power that dissolves the past to determine the future. It is manifestly incompatible with secular historicism.

Taylor’s *A Catholic Modernity?* explains how these disparate strands of secularization have emerged. His lecture began by observing that a definitive feature of modern culture is its emphasis on the primacy of life: its will to alleviate human suffering, and extend human rights and freedoms universally.<sup>500</sup> Taylor elucidated the Christian origins of these values and narrated their secularist turn.<sup>501</sup> In Christendom the primacy of life was affirmed practically, on the basis of a theological mandate; in modernity the primacy of life is affirmed practically (and, to Taylor’s mind, more effectively than in Christendom), but the theology has been shorn off because it tended to limit the extension of freedom and rights.<sup>502</sup> Aversion to religious truth has thus become a moral position adopted with a spirit

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<sup>498</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

<sup>500</sup> Taylor and Heft, *A Catholic Modernity?* 19.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid., 10–11.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid., 21.

of post-revolutionary “adamance” in modern culture, and any sense that “human life aims beyond itself, is stamped as an illusion; and judged to be a dangerous illusion.”<sup>503</sup> What Taylor noted, however, was that the moral philosophy of secular humanism—the practical affirmation of the primacy of human life without its historical theological framework—is vulnerable to a “revolt from within.”<sup>504</sup> The most influential unbelieving revolutionary in moral philosophy, he argued, “is undoubtedly Nietzsche.”<sup>505</sup> For Nietzsche “rebelled against the idea that our highest goal is to preserve and increase life, to prevent suffering. He rejects this both metaphysically and practically.”<sup>506</sup> With the realization that secular humanism offers no ethically binding ultimate metaphysical goals to warrant the commitment to the practical primacy of life and the alleviation of suffering, Nietzsche sought to “rehabilitate destruction and chaos, the infliction of suffering and exploitation, as part of the life to be affirmed.”<sup>507</sup> In this way, Nietzsche has destabilized the homogeneity of modern atheism by establishing a separate and rival intellectual tradition to secular humanism, and this tradition produced “the most important anti-humanist thinkers of our time: e.g. Foucault, Derrida”.<sup>508</sup> By straining out these divergent philosophical positions, Taylor complicated a simplistic configuration of modern culture as the site of a frontal conflict between the religious and the secular. Instead, he encouraged his audience to “think of modern culture as the scene of a three cornered...battle. There are secular humanists, there are neo-Nietzscheans, and there are those who acknowledge some good beyond life. Any pair can gang up against the third on some important issue.”<sup>509</sup> This triangulation also correlates with current positions in the philosophy of history. Just as the ascendent moral position in modern culture is a secular

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<sup>503</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>504</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>506</sup> Ibid.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid., 27.

humanism, so too the hegemonic mode of modern historical writing is secular historicism: an empirical approach to history that acknowledges its epistemological limits but believes in the possibility of accurate knowledge of a true past, whilst ignoring the inescapably theological underpinnings of this metaphysical assumption. Likewise, there are neo-Nietzschean revolutionaries in the philosophy of history: currently organized in the “Theory Revolt” movement. They recognize the theological nature of historicism because they detect the metaphysical concept of truth implicit in its “scientific” method, and the theology implied in ontological realism. Similarly, as modern culture retains those who affirm the practical primacy of life and the theology that mandates this affirmation, so too there are historians who practice the empirical historical method, with confidence in the authenticity of narrative representation, on the basis of a self-conscious theological rationale. As Taylor notes, any two groups can pair up against the third. In this case, believing historians agree with neo-Nietzscheans that confidence in the empirical historical method and faith in the ontological fixity of the past rest inescapably on theology. Whilst secular historicists and believing historians partner to condemn the neo-Nietzschean denial of ontological realism, and to affirm the empirical historical method. Yet neo-Nietzscheans and secular historicists together concur against believing historians that theology has no place in historical theory.

The secular historicist position is most precarious, because it is charged with contradiction. Secular historicists may attempt to ground the rationality of their position non-theologically in theories of “memory” or “presence,” but neither of these theories have the capacity to rebut the deconstruction of the foundational assumption of fixed historical ontology from which these theories are derived. Such is the unrelenting nature of deconstruction; it troubled even White himself—for two reasons. First, for its ability to destroy all values: “When the world is denied all substance and perception is blind, who is to say who are the chosen and who are the damned? On what grounds can we assert that the

insane, the criminal, and the barbarian are wrong?”<sup>510</sup> Again, the author of *Metahistory* noted, “with Derrida ‘there is no ‘meaning,’ only the ghostly ballet of alternative ‘meanings’ which various modes of figuration provide.”<sup>511</sup> Kleinberg’s defence is that, “the history Derrida advocates is not a ‘free for all’ where perspective and judgement are suspended but instead a call to understand how every context can itself be contextualised that is ever wary of the ways that the historical project is always in danger of being ‘reappropriated by metaphysics.’”<sup>512</sup> This is a practical impossibility that can be illustrated by remaining with White’s concern for justice. If the anathematized metaphysics alone can secure ontological realism—that an event “happened in a certain way at a certain time”—then without metaphysics, juries cannot, in any “real” sense, arbitrate between the narrative explanations of prosecution and defence with regards to criminal events: on what grounds can their finding of the accused’s guilt or innocence, be true? White is right that with Derrida no one can be declared wrong, and in Kleinberg’s appropriation of Derrida, no one can be “found” to have done wrong. White’s second concern was with the nature of the values deconstruction might re-inscribe: “I am inclined to think that he [Derrida] is not a relativist at all, or that he is one only in an instrumentalist way, in preparation for the kind of mysticism represented by the poet Edmund Jabès.”<sup>513</sup> The surprise at the end of *Haunting History* was Kleinberg’s introduction to his forthcoming book on the Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas (1905–1995): a book comprised of two “gestures or sessions,” with the first session constituting a contextualist intellectual history, whilst the second offers a counter-interpretation led by Levinas’s own religious views. The aim of this approach is to

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<sup>510</sup> Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 282. Cited in Kleinberg, *Haunting History*, 29, 78.

<sup>511</sup> White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 281. Cited in Kleinberg, *Haunting History*, 30. See also, Hayden White, “The Absurdist Moment in Contemporary Literary Theory,” *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 17, no. 3 (1976): 378–403.

<sup>512</sup> Kleinberg, *Haunting History*, 23.

<sup>513</sup> Chorell, “Incomplete Secularisation,” 37.

“destabilise the authority of each possible past,” yet reveal how both are inextricable because the theological reading “is always already at work in the first via the theologico-historical mechanism that is silently employed to ‘hold’ the past and make it accessible in the present. In this light the second reading emerges from and is necessitated by the first.”<sup>514</sup> Chorell seems aghast at Kleinberg’s proposal. He asks incredulously, “[i]s Kleinberg really willing to write a *historical account* in which divine authority, revelation, and elation are *key components*?”<sup>515</sup> This leads him to his “disturbing...hunch”: “Does deconstruction offer a reintroduction of religious principles into the very heart of historiography?”<sup>516</sup> For if it does, it will “upset the reader’s expectations of reaching a more secular relationship to the past. Instead, we will be introduced to a new, radical, post-secular historiography.”<sup>517</sup> Kleinberg did not emerge as a vocal advocate for theism.<sup>518</sup> Elsewhere, he has explained his motives for theologizing secular historicism, “[t]he point here is not to advocate for a return to, or privileging of, a religious understanding of history...I want to remove the safety net under both the theologico-historical and ontological-realist positions in order to explore the instabilities of the past...”<sup>519</sup> When asked to discuss his decision to write secular and religious interpretations of Levinas’s life, he explained, “[o]ne could look at this in the weaker sense of multiple perspective, but what I am trying to get at is the way the past is contradictory and unstable... different things at the same time.”<sup>520</sup> This does not easily translate into a theological conception of the past as God’s creation. But what is left to stop the historian who does view the past in this way?

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<sup>514</sup> Kleinberg, *Haunting History*, 229.

<sup>515</sup> Chorell, “Incomplete Secularisation,” 44. Emphasis original.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid., 44–45.

<sup>518</sup> Ethan Kleinberg, *Emmanuel Levinas’s Talmudic Turn: Philosophy and Jewish Thought* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021).

<sup>519</sup> Kleinberg, *Haunting History*, 148.

<sup>520</sup> André de Silva Ramos, “Ethan Kleinberg: Theory of History as Hauntology/Ethan Kleinberg: Teoria da Historia como Fantologia,” *Historia Da Historiografia*, no. 25 (2017): 212–228, 223.

The “Theory Revolt” ought to heed the second sense of the word “Revolution”: they may inadvertently bring historicism full circle. George Marsden’s sympathetic response to Taylor’s lecture noted how aptly the parabolic metaphor of prodigality correlates with his construal of modern culture: the age which presumptively took its inheritance of moral values, and spent them with no source of replenishment.<sup>521</sup> The analogy carries to modern historical theory, where historians have shorn off theology to become intoxicated with naturalistic explanations, leaving themselves “theoretically defenseless” against the “Theory Revolt” from within unbelief, unable to justify their faith in the reality of the past. Marsden suggests that a compelling call to this modern prodigal will give dignity to its achievements—here the perspective of believing historians has much more potency than that of the neo-Nietzscheans. For where the “Theory Revolt” aims to destroy historicism with critique; the ecclesiastical historian relates a message of redemption. Augustine was able to affirm the scientific findings of fourth-century astronomers: “With the mind and intellect which you have given them, they investigate these matters. They have found out much....About the creation they say many things that are true.”<sup>522</sup> Likewise the ecclesiastical historian can affirm that secular historicists have established the factuality of many past events, and written accurate narratives of historical explanation: their work is more than fiction—a neo-Nietzschean cannot say this. But Augustine’s affirmation of astronomical science also came with a challenge, “[t]hey can foresee a future eclipse of the sun, but do not perceive their own eclipse in the present. For they do not in a religious spirit investigate the source of the intelligence with which they research into these matters.”<sup>523</sup> Here

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<sup>521</sup> George Marsden, “Matteo Ricci and the Prodigal Culture,” in *A Catholic Modernity?* 83–93, 85. See also, George Marsden and Bradley Longfield, *The Secularization of the Academy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>522</sup> Augustine, *Confessions: A New Translation by Henry Chadwick*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 74–75.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

Augustine’s theological vision of the nature of scientific knowledge accounts for both the success (factual discovery) and crisis (theoretical poverty) of secular historicism; but rather than observe its lack of epistemic justification and render condemnation, this insight also charts the course for the salvation for historical knowledge. The attempted murder of “scientific” history is sought to enable the rise of an aesthetic history: for Nietzsche believed that the realization of his vision for monumental history, “will no doubt happen only when the astronomers have again become astrologers.”<sup>524</sup> The critical historical theory of the “Theory Revolt” is written to call for this transitional death sentence over secular historicism and indeed modern culture, “*It seeks to challenge the very logic of past and present, now and then, here and there, us and them* upon which both disciplinary history and the actual social order largely depend.”<sup>525</sup> Their “rage” is against the prodigal offspring of a Christian moral and intellectual tradition, and they are calling for its condemnation. Thus, the philosophy of secular historicism will soon face the choice to repent or perish. Will it then return to the confession *Dominus Illuminatio Mea*; or let go of truth, and fall into the void? The next section develops the point that ecclesiastical history charts the course for the salvation of historical knowledge.

### III

When he wrote the first ecclesiastical history, Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260–c.340) was consciously pioneering a new genre of historical literature. He understood the Christian Church as a divine institution, governed by successions of bishops and defined by a body of doctrine. His *Ecclesiastical History* therefore synthesised methodological elements from political history and the history of ideas in order to recount the divinely ordained narrative of the Church’s past. He wrote from an explicitly theological perspective, but retained a

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<sup>524</sup> Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 70.

<sup>525</sup> Kleinberg, Scott, and Wilder, *Theses on Theory and History*, III.8. Emphasis original.

commitment to historical accuracy. Indeed, every attempt Eusebius made towards narrative construction was refracted through his theological understanding of the Church. His *Ecclesiastical History* sought to recount the “successions from the holy apostles”; the “important affairs” of the church “and those who took a prominent place in that history as leaders and presidents”; and the conflict between the Church and the world, characterised as, “the war which has been waged by the heathen against the divine word”.<sup>526</sup> These emphases on the leadership, the great events, and the external conflict of the Church, are reconfigurations of the central themes of a political history of a nation-state. Arnaldo Momigliano synthesised Eusebius’ theology of the Church and its implications for method: “The Christians were a nation in his view. Thus he was writing national history. But this nation had a transcendental origin.”<sup>527</sup> From its inception, ecclesiastical history has sought to construct historical narratives that recount the experience of the Church: the Church has been understood as a distinct and intrinsically theological entity, located in a theological metanarrative of salvation history. These foundational assumptions underlay the discipline until the twentieth century.

In the nineteenth century, British ecclesiastical historians enjoyed a privileged position in the historical profession. They forthrightly articulated their methodological commitments: ecclesiastical history was central to all historical enquiry, and the theoretical assumptions of ecclesiastical historians dictated the historical theory of the wider discipline. Moreover, education in ecclesiastical history was deemed valuable for all students and the laity, not only for ordinands.

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<sup>526</sup> Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine*, trans. H. J. Lawlor and J.E.L. Oulton (London: SPCK, 1927), 3.

<sup>527</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century: Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 90.

William Lee (1815–1883) was Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Dublin from 1857–1862, and Archdeacon of Dublin from 1864 until his death.<sup>528</sup> In 1858 he published his *Three Introductory Lectures on Ecclesiastical History*. They communicated an understanding of the discipline that was typical of nineteenth-century Anglicanism. He argued that “the history of the Church must be studied in connexion with general history.”<sup>529</sup> He emphasised the close relationship between the Church and state, and asserted that “the provinces of Civil and Ecclesiastical history [are] explicitly intertwined.”<sup>530</sup> However, his understanding of the Church as a subject of historical inquiry was explicitly theological; it was the divine institution that existed distinctly as the body of Christ within various nations and historical cultures.<sup>531</sup> Lee observed that the Christian faith, and the Church were the foundation of European civilisation. He argued that ecclesiastical history was therefore more valuable than political history, because “no one, whether speculative student or practical statesman,” can attain any understanding of the history, constitution, or laws of their country, without giving, “due weight to the influence of the church.”<sup>532</sup> Lee went further and stressed that the insights of ecclesiastical historians must diffuse through other disciplines. He stated, “I believe that no department of intellectual research can offer more important or more attractive results to students of every class.”<sup>533</sup> He elaborated that this claim does not pertain only to theologians, though “the very rudiments of [their] science depend upon this knowledge”; it also relates to “the general body of educated men, whose training is the duty of our universities”; “the statesman” who seeks practical wisdom for governance from the “philosophy which teaches by examples”; and any individual who desires “to trace the

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<sup>528</sup> Gordon Goodwin, “Lee, William (1815–1883), Church of Ireland clergyman,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB Online, 23 September 2004).

<sup>529</sup> William Lee, *Three Introductory Lectures on Ecclesiastical History* (Dublin: Dublin University Press, 1858), 9.

<sup>530</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

fortunes of mankind.”<sup>534</sup> He also argued that ecclesiastical history is the most interesting aspect of civil histories.<sup>535</sup> Lee noted that historians in the nineteenth century began to analyse, describe, and narrate the manner in which historical events connected to one another. He asserted that nothing offers more explanatory power for this analysis than the study of “the spread of the Christian Faith, the expansion of the Christian Church.”<sup>536</sup> Lee also emphasised the dependence of all other historians on ecclesiastical history, he observed that clerics represent the best if not the only available sources for each time period.<sup>537</sup>

Mandell Creighton (1843–1901), in his inaugural lecture as the first Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Cambridge, “The Teaching of Ecclesiastical History” (1885), reiterated these foundational assumptions. Creighton’s appointment came almost thirty years after Lee’s, and his methodological emphases illustrate the increasing professionalisation of the historical discipline. Creighton had more thoroughly incorporated a Rankean emphasis on the scientific nature of historical inquiry; and contended for this focus in the university’s revision of the tripos.<sup>538</sup> Creighton, like Lee, asserted the value of ecclesiastical history across disciplines: “there are few branches of study which open a wider field than does that of ecclesiastical history”.<sup>539</sup> He also located ecclesiastical history at the centre of the historical discipline: “it is not too much to say that till the end of the seventeenth century ecclesiastical history is the surest guide to the comprehension of European history as a whole.”<sup>540</sup> Creighton described the historian’s experience of writing ecclesiastical history in theological terms. “In the history of Christianity he sees the traces of God’s working in the world: he feels the need of setting forth against unbelief the plain unvarnished

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<sup>534</sup> Ibid.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>538</sup> Georg Iggers and James Powell, *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 148.

<sup>539</sup> Mandell Creighton and Louise Creighton, *Historical Lectures and Addresses* (London: Longmans, Green, 1903), 22.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid., 16, 21.

story of the work which the Church, however hampered by faults or corruptions, has nevertheless been enabled to work in the world.”<sup>541</sup> Not only did Creighton assert a theological understanding of the past, he also assumed that the ecclesiastical historian would be a Christian, and would find the study of ecclesiastical history apologetically inspiring. These assumptions intensified in Creighton’s lecture, he continued: the historian “burns to show how the Church has, through strange vicissitudes, knit together European society in the past, and must be its bond in the future.”<sup>542</sup> Creighton believed that the study of ecclesiastical history should prompt a spiritual excitement and zeal, and identified the heightened influence of the institutional Church in society as the locus for this energy. For Creighton, “How that bond can be made firmer, how the organisation of the Church can be best fitted for its work, these are momentous questions on which the experience of the past may well be consulted with eagerness.”<sup>543</sup> Therefore, “when history became a professional discipline in the nineteenth century, ecclesiastical history lay at its heart.”<sup>544</sup> Its assumptions were foundational for the wider discipline, and the past it illuminated was the most valuable for the education of individuals and the improvement of society.

When Sarah Foot gave her inaugural lecture as Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Oxford in 2011, “Thinking with Christians: Doing Ecclesiastical History in a Secular Age”, her title reflected the intellectual-historical transformations that had occurred in Britain during the twentieth century. The lecture was further developed as an address to the Ecclesiastical Historical Society in its fiftieth anniversary year when Foot acted as President. She addressed that group polemically: “Has ecclesiastical history lost its sense of purpose, its place at the heart of historical enterprise, to the extent that it has become not just marginalized and peripheral, but essentially irrelevant both to academic study and

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<sup>541</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>544</sup> Sarah Foot, “Has Ecclesiastical History Lost the Plot?” *Studies in Church History*, no. 49 (2013): 1–25, 4.

wider society?”<sup>545</sup> In a sophisticated and wide-ranging survey of modern historiography, Foot delineated the relevant methodological shifts that had occurred in the discipline since the 1950s, commenting: “nothing in these methodological shifts to look at history from below, through sociological or anthropological lenses, threatened the basis on which all ecclesiastical history must rest: the inspired narrative of the origins and development of the churches since the days of Christ.”<sup>546</sup> The gravest challenge arose through late twentieth century epistemological shifts, for example, “to argue that there is no past there to recover—a corollary of relativizing epistemological claims—challenges most profoundly the foundations on which ecclesiastical history has always rested, and threatens to unpick the endeavour itself, unravelling the plot that lies at its heart.”<sup>547</sup> Foot therefore asserted: “If this society is to have a future, it needs to engage directly with where secular historians have taken the study of Christianity and the churches, and to challenge those readings on methodological grounds.”<sup>548</sup> So, Foot’s article concluded, “It is time for ecclesiastical historians to speak out against the secularizing trends evident most obviously in the new cultural history, to show how powerfully a religious turn can illuminate both ecclesiastical and secular pasts, and to reassert our centrality within the historical profession.”<sup>549</sup>

An essay in *The SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory* (2012) by John Zammito contended for the robustness of historicism against the relativizing force of postmodern sensibilities. It articulated two points that are especially pertinent for an ecclesiastical-historical response to both Taylor’s mythopoietic approach in *A Secular Age* and the relativism of neo-Nietzschean historical writing. First, in response to *A Secular Age*: “Both for philosophers and historians,” Zammito observed,

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<sup>545</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid., 25.

‘providing intelligible descriptions and explanations of [change]’ is extremely difficult. Consequently, *localizing* inquiry holds the best prospect for substantive outcomes. All historians and many philosophers of science have acknowledged this by their practices: grand theory of science as a whole has come increasingly to be displaced by situation-specific methodological and epistemological study. Much if not all that is interesting in current science studies is pursued *locally or situationally* within ongoing empirical scientific sites of practice.<sup>550</sup>

In developing a methodological critique of Taylor’s reading of early modern Protestantism from an ecclesiastical-historical perspective, this dissertation’s next chapter stresses the inadequacies of Taylor’s causal account of secularization because it does not adopt such a localizing approach. By contrast, through a positive localized study of Calvin’s theology of the Supper this dissertation communicates an evidentially grounded representation of his sacramental thought. A second point from of Zammito’s essay articulates a foundational insight that can underlie an ecclesiastical-historical response to neo-Nietzschean historical writing:

By suggesting that colligatory concepts—and historical representations containing them—have a referential component, a cognitive, and not merely a formal intention (however contingent and fallible), I am arguing for the robustness of historicism. If historical practice is rational...this historicism—commonplace among practicing historians...deserves to be philosophically explained, not discredited ‘logically.’<sup>551</sup>

From the commonplace practice of historicism, it is possible to articulate a transcendental argument for the mimetic efficacy of historical narrative realism. Realist history and a correspondence theory of truth are the operating assumptions when scholars try to represent another’s ideas. That fact of experience is foundational to the whole endeavour of research. A philosophical explanation for the mimetic efficacy of historical narrative realism is formulable by ecclesiastical historians whose scholarship integrates empirical historical

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<sup>550</sup> Ibid., 417. Emphasis original.

<sup>551</sup> Zammito, “Post-Positivist Realism: Regrounding Representation,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory*, 416.

research and realist history with the theological justification that events within time are God's creation of an objective story, which is the transcendental basis for accurate narrative representation. The subsequent chapters are written on this basis and seek to illustrate that an intrinsically theological, empirical ecclesiastical history committed to this ideal of historical writing as literary mimesis more accurately represents Christian experience by writing a history of redemption rather than Reform Master Narrative.

## Part Two.

### Perspectives and Challenges from the History of Redemption

## Chapter Five.

### John Calvin and the “Disenchantment” of the Lord’s Supper

*Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”  
Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”*

—John 20:27–28.

The escamoteur knows how to make inapparent. He is expert in a hyper-phenomenology.

Now, the height of the conjuring trick here consists in causing to disappear while producing “apparitions,” which is only contradictory in appearance, precisely, since one causes to disappear by provoking hallucinations or by inducing visions.... The reduction as subjectivization of the corporeal form of the external phantom is but a super-idealization and a supplementary spectralization.

—Derrida ~ *Spectres of Marx*.<sup>552</sup>

#### CHARLES TAYLOR’S PHENOMENOLOGY OF SECULARITY

Charles Taylor’s definitive and paradigm-altering contribution to research on Western secularization was his notion of “Secularity 3”. In his introduction to *A Secular Age*, he differentiated three kinds of secularity: (1) the secularization of the public sphere; (2) the decline of religious belief and practise; and (3) the secularization of the modern Westerner’s “background”. To illustrate this differentiation between types 1 and 2, consider the United States and the United Kingdom. The constitution of the United States officially separates church and state (in the sense of Secularity 1), but religious belief and practice is relatively high (in the sense of Secularity 2) whereas the United Kingdom is officially Christian (and therefore not secular in the sense of Secularity 1) but religious belief and practice is relatively

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<sup>552</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Apparition of the Inapparent: The Phenomenological ‘Conjuring Trick’” in *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, 125–176, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), 128, 130.

low (in the sense of Secularity 2). These aspects of secularization (Secularity types 1 and 2) are longstanding, well-established concerns in political theory, sociology, and history.<sup>553</sup>

“Secularity 3”, however, was an entirely original contribution to the literature on secularization.<sup>554</sup> Presenting this idea as a synthetic concept that fused insights from Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Michael Polanyi, Taylor identified/created a new object for analysis.<sup>555</sup> He introduced it memorably as follows:

Now I believe that an examination of this age as secular is worth taking up in a third sense, closely related to the second, and not without connection to the first. This would focus on the conditions of belief.<sup>556</sup>

In the reception of Taylor’s historical account of Western secularization, the full significance of this philosophically inflected “focus on the conditions of belief” is rarely appreciated.<sup>557</sup> Most commentators read this focus superficially by hastily reaching for the low-hanging conceptual fruit in the quotations below:

This would focus on the conditions of belief. The shift to secularity in this sense consists, among other things, of a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.<sup>558</sup>

So what I want to do is examine our society as secular in this third sense, which I could perhaps encapsulate in this way: the change I want to define and trace is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in

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<sup>553</sup> E.g., John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971); Bruce, *Secularization*; Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>554</sup> Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun, “Editors’ Introduction,” in *Varieties of Secularism in A Secular Age*, 1–31, 5.

<sup>555</sup> For an early articulation of Taylor’s foundational insight drawn from these thinkers, see: Taylor, *Hegel*, 467, 567; also, *SS*, 460.

<sup>556</sup> *ASA*, 2–3.

<sup>557</sup> Peter Gordon and Peter Woodford are noteworthy exceptions. See Peter Gordon, “The Place of the Sacred in the Absence of God: Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 69, no. 4 (2008): 647–673, especially 656–658; and Peter Woodford, “Specters of the Nineteenth Century: Charles Taylor and the Problem of Historicism,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, vol. 40, no. 1 (2012): 171–192. See also the response, Guido Vanheeswijck, “Does History Matter? Charles Taylor on the Transcendental Validity of Social Imaginaries,” *History and Theory*, vol. 54, no. 1 (2015): 69–85.

<sup>558</sup> *ASA*, 2.

which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others.<sup>559</sup>

Writing to celebrate Taylor's ninetieth birthday in the *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Maeve Cooke expounded his taxonomy of secularity and claimed: "[Secularity 3] is the move from a society in which belief in God is obvious to one in which it is understood as one option among others."<sup>560</sup> This is a true and conventional reading, but perhaps it tends to skim over the full import of Taylor's phenomenological approach.<sup>561</sup> If one scrutinizes the direct object in the sentence closely, the deep well of theory underlying Taylor's notion of "Secularity 3" begins to come into view: "the change I want to trace *is one* which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which [belief in God is a choice]." In explicit phenomenological terms, Taylor is attempting to identify and narrate how our precritical embodied coping with the world has changed in the West, and how this underlies the new, intuitively presumed naturalism of "Secularity 3" (where belief in God is a fragilized option, not axiomatic).<sup>562</sup> Here is the paragraph which clarifies this:

Secularity in this sense is a matter of the whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious experience and search takes place. By 'context of understanding' here, I mean both matters that will probably have been explicitly formulated by almost everyone, such as the plurality of options, and some which form the implicit, largely unfocussed background of this experience and search, its "pre-ontology", to use a Heideggerian term.<sup>563</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> ASA, 2.

<sup>560</sup> Maeve Cooke, "Immanent Critique of the Immanent Frame: The Critical Potential of A *Secular Age*," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 29, no. 5 (2021): 738–758, 739: "The term 'frame' is *relatively straightforward*, referring to the sensed context within which humans develop their fundamental beliefs about the world and their place within it." Emphasis added.

<sup>561</sup> For another example of this typical reading, see James K. A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 21. In fn. 29 Smith gives indication that Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have been significant influences in shaping Taylor's hermeneutical phenomenological approach, but he does not examine the nature or the significance of this influence.

<sup>562</sup> See Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991). ASA, 558, 780fn14. Also, Hubert Dreyfus, "Taylor's (Anti-) Epistemology," in *Charles Taylor*, ed. Ruth Abbey, 52–83 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>563</sup> ASA, 3.

In *Sein und Zeit/Being and Time* (1927; trans. 2010), Heidegger had called for existential analysis of *Dasein*—i.e., hermeneutic phenomenology of the human experience of being-in-the-world—to discern fundamental ontology.<sup>564</sup> “*Ontology is possible only as phenomenology*”, he claimed.<sup>565</sup> So, the question of being can only be approached via the pre-theoretical consideration of the direct *manifestation* of being. In Heidegger’s words, “the question of being is nothing else than the radicalization of an essential tendency of being that belongs to *Dasein* itself, namely, the pre-ontological understanding of being.”<sup>566</sup> This “pre-ontological understanding of being”, vital for Taylor, relates to the manifestation or appearance of being as it is beheld but before it is formally or theoretically grasped with antiquated metaphysical concepts. Taylor’s appreciation for this approach is longstanding. One of his earliest articles, “The Pre-Objective World” (1958), described phenomenology in the work of Merleau-Ponty:

Genetical phenomenology sets itself the task of explaining our perception of the objective world by means of a pure and presuppositionless description of its “genesis” in the “pre-objective world” of our original experience.<sup>567</sup>

So, although Taylor cites Heidegger’s conception of “pre-ontology” and gestures towards Wittgenstein’s idea that “a picture held us captive” and Polanyi’s “tacit understanding” in formulating his post-foundationalist concept of “the largely unfocused background”, the seeds of his distinctive genetical-phenomenological approach to Western secularization are discernible in his earliest work on Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the “pre-objective world”.<sup>568</sup> Heidegger’s work may be antecedent in the history of philosophy, but the encounter with Merleau-Ponty’s thought took precedence in the history of Taylor’s

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<sup>564</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), 12, 26–37.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*, 33. Emphasis original.

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>567</sup> Michael Kullman and Charles Taylor, “The Pre-Objective World,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1958): 108–132, 110.

<sup>568</sup> ASA, 794fn12.

philosophy.<sup>569</sup> Taylor draws from Heidegger's prioritization of ontology as an apologetic strategy in defence of moral realism, but his historiographically innovative genetical phenomenology of Western naturalism is a deeply Merleau-Pontyan project—inflected by Hegel's metaphysical historicism.

In *Hegel*, Taylor commented:

[C]ontemporary philosophy has been concerned with showing how the clarity of our most explicit conceptual formulations reposes on a background of which we are not fully aware and which we can perhaps never exhaustively explore. Much that is implicit, for instance, in the very system of concepts or classifications that we use to formulate our clearest thought remains unstated and possibly unstatable [sic]. In very different ways, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Polanyi and Merleau-Ponty, for instance, have explored this avenue of the limits of the explicit or of clear explanation. The important issue which is at stake between Hegel and contemporary philosophy will emerge more clearly below.<sup>570</sup>

Beyond observing this crystalline exposition of the essential theory underlying “Secularity 3” as early as 1975, there are two points to draw from this quotation, before considering how Taylor elucidates what is at stake between Hegel and contemporary philosophy. First, to introduce a methodological concern: if the implicit background of our understanding *in the present* is the “unstated and the possibly unstatable [sic]” is there any methodologically conceivable way that Taylor can claim to learn and state the implicit background of his historical subjects, a sixteenth-century Genevan peasant taking Communion, for example? Perhaps this begins to indicate why Derrida called phenomenology a “conjuring trick”.<sup>571</sup> And why that designation might apply to Taylor's “story” about the “largely unfocused background”.<sup>572</sup> Second, it is worth making the passing observation that the philosophical quartet of “Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Polanyi and Merleau-Ponty” loses a member in A

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<sup>569</sup> *Contra* Michel Meijer, “Strong evaluation and weak ontology. The predicament of Charles Taylor,” *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, vol. 75, no. 5 (2014): 440–459, 441.

<sup>570</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 467. Emphasis added.

<sup>571</sup> Derrida, “The Apparition of the Inapparent” in *Specters of Marx*, 128.

<sup>572</sup> ASA, ix, 3.

*Secular Age*, as Merleau-Ponty elides from view.<sup>573</sup> The “important issue” which Taylor perceives as “at stake between Hegel and contemporary philosophy” lies in the relationship between Hegel’s ontology and his understanding of conceptual thought.

Hegel’s *Phänomenologie des Geistes/Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807; trans. 1977) claimed to be a scientific exposition of Absolute Spirit’s coming to rational self-awareness in and through world history. According to Hegel, Absolute Spirit manifests itself in the world *to itself* in finite spirits of embodied consciousness in a dialectical process of progressive self-understanding—e.g., from religious representation of itself to itself through to philosophical knowledge of itself in itself—culminating in pure conceptual self-knowledge—realized on the final pages of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* when Absolute Spirit grasps itself in conceptual understanding in the finite embodied spirit of Hegel’s mind.<sup>574</sup>

This progressivist epistemology with its stress on embodied subjectivity has shaped Taylor’s narrative in *A Secular Age*. “Men of any given culture may function on a number of levels,” Taylor wrote,

e.g., in art, conversation, ritual, self-revelation, scientific study; and over history new conceptualizations and new modes of awareness emerge. It may be that our thought on any one level can only be understood by its relation to the other levels; in particular our ‘higher’, more explicit awareness may always repose on a background of the implicit and the unreflected. We can easily recognize here some of these themes in contemporary philosophy.<sup>575</sup>

The “themes in contemporary philosophy” that Taylor is referring to are the post-foundationalist epistemologies found in Heidegger, Polanyi, the later Wittgenstein, and structuralism; and his macro-historical view of the developmental emergence of “new conceptualizations and new modes of awareness” is inspired by Hegel. These sources inform Taylor’s understanding that distinct modes of awareness are progressively formulated

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<sup>573</sup> Cf. *ASA*, 13.

<sup>574</sup> Hegel, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*.

<sup>575</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 567. Emphasis added.

throughout history from within a cultural locus of embodied subjectivity. This philosophy of history underlies his notion of “Secularity 3”, and his identification of “ritual” as a significant “level” of subjective and cultural “function” foreshadows the vital role for Reformed sacramental theology in cultivating a “new mode of awareness”.<sup>576</sup> Taylor recognizes, however, that post-Hegelian phenomenological musings on the “implicit background” to the development of conceptual thought face a significant problem. It was definitive of Hegel’s system that new stages of conceptual thought and awareness were reached in the dialectical process of Absolute Spirit manifesting itself from itself to itself: that was *what was going on* in the “background”. Yet Taylor contends that Hegel’s ontology of Absolute Spirit is “dead” insofar as his system of Absolute Idealism is no longer intellectually plausible.<sup>577</sup> In his view, an important aspect of Hegel’s philosophical legacy was to bequeath two opposing tendencies to modern Western thought—these were able to find their resolution in Hegel’s system, but have apparently not found compelling reconciliation since: the notion that final descriptive conceptual clarity of embodied subjectivity is attainable (e.g., psychological behaviourism), and the idea that our conceptual grasp of the world is a historical and cultural construction. In Hegel’s Absolute Idealism the contingency of conceptual thought did not undermine its claim to final clarity because the contingencies were themselves aspects of the Absolute Idea. But without Hegel’s ontology, as Taylor argues, this resolution is untenable. Ultimately, he observes, “those who are trying to relate linguistic consciousness to its matrix in unreflective life—once Hegel’s log-ontology is set aside—must necessarily see explicit thought as rooted in an implicit sense of the situation which can never be fully explored.”<sup>578</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> See also, *SS*, 206.

<sup>577</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 569–570.

<sup>578</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 569. Emphasis added.

This is the “important issue” which, according to Taylor, “is at stake between Hegel and contemporary philosophy” and it relates to the essence of the phenomenological method: Hegel’s ontology enabled him to grasp the “background” phenomenologically with conceptual clarity *as* the manifestation of Absolute Spirit. Lacking Hegel’s ontology, modern philosophers and phenomenologists cannot *grasp* the “background” they can only try to give an *impression* of it hermeneutically, and *it* is reduced to an “implicit sense”. What they are *sensing* and interpreting, then, is the ghost of Hegel’s “dead” ontology: now phenomenologists, e.g., Taylor with his notion of “Secularity 3”, each conjure their own *ghost* of Hegel’s *Geist* to work in the “background” creating “new conceptualizations and new modes of awareness” for *them* to *sense* and *impress* on their readers. This raises the definitive methodological question for Taylor’s “Master Narrative”: can any aspect of a historical agent’s “implicit sense” of their situation be empirically determined and then subjected to a standard criterion of verification? The answer of course is no.

*A Secular Age* should not be considered as a fundamentally misguided effort to make a formal historical argument. It is an enormously sophisticated work that strategically utilizes phenomenology to create powerful historical *impressions*. Taylor’s preface, despite its crafted discretion, confirms this reading.

I am telling a story, that of what we usually call “secularization” in the modern West. And in doing so, I am trying to clarify what this process, often invoked, but still not very clear, amounts to.<sup>579</sup>

This “process...amounts” to “Secularity 3” (a “new mode of awareness”) that Taylor is “trying to clarify” by means of hermeneutic phenomenology. Yet Brad Gregory, as a Roman Catholic, has candidly rejected Taylor’s hermeneutic phenomenology of the fragilization of modern faith: “*Pace* Taylor, it simply is not the case that ‘We all shunt between two

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<sup>579</sup> ASA, ix.

stances.”<sup>580</sup> How could their intra-Catholic disagreement about their experience of the “background” ever be arbitrated? Phenomenology attains no conclusions, only impressions and senses; strictly speaking, it can never yield *scientia*. Moreover, consider the kind of intuitive naturalism described by Calvin in the *Institutes*,

in regard to the fabric and admirable arrangement of the universe, how few of us are there who, in lifting our eyes to the heavens, or looking abroad on the various regions of the earth, ever think of the Creator? Do we not rather overlook Him, and sluggishly content ourselves with a view of his works? And then in regard to supernatural events, though these are occurring every day, how few are there who ascribe them to the ruling providence of God—how many who imagine that they are casual results produced by the blind evolutions of the wheel of chance?<sup>581</sup>

Clearly “the earlier ‘naïve’ framework” of sixteenth-century “enchantment” seems to have been able to slip very far into the “background” indeed.

Is the causal account of secularization delineated in *A Secular Age* subject to verification or falsification? Only in rare instances. As Taylor explained in 2010, describing his phenomenological approach to the “background” in *A Secular Age*: “This wider grasp has no clear limits...It can never be adequately expressed in the form of explicit doctrines, because of its very unlimited and indefinite nature.”<sup>582</sup> Generally, this analysis cannot be falsified provided Taylor’s inferences regarding changes in the categorically indefinite “background” are vaguely plausible. Only a rare moment of historical error, such as Taylor’s claim that Calvin was a “desacralizer” reveals the phenomenological sleight of hand. A notable feature of “Secularity 3” is not just its phenomenological plasticity, but also its universality. “Secularity 3”, as Taylor explains, “takes us” into a new background of fragilization “even for the staunchest believer”.<sup>583</sup> So in the end, it is not actually an account

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<sup>580</sup> Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 12.

<sup>581</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.V.XI. trans. Henry Beveridge.

<sup>582</sup> Charles Taylor, “Afterword,” in *Varieties of Secularism*, 300–321, 309.

<sup>583</sup> ASA, 3.

of the rise of modern Western atheism *per se* but the rise of a new and nebulous collective sense, ostensibly encapsulating everyone from Richard Dawkins to Brad Gregory. Gramsci had observed that political power in the modern West was not principally exerted coercively, but through cultural hegemony; and that the cultural hegemony of the Capitalist order orientated and determined the thought and values of those who lived under it. So, Gramsci called for “the modern prince” to advance a revolutionary counter-hegemony. Yet, as he wrote,

The modern prince, the myth-prince, cannot be a real person, a concrete individual; it can only be an organism; a complex element of society in which the cementing of a collective will, recognised and partially asserted in action has already begun.<sup>584</sup>

Gramsci’s myth-prince was to be the vehicle for the “cementing” of a Socialist “collective will” and Taylor’s Master Narrative works to do that phenomenologically through the projection of a nebulous mode of awareness that is ostensibly ubiquitous in Western culture, namely: “Secularity 3”. Moreover, in Gramsci’s “Critical Notes on an Attempt at a Popular Presentation of Marxism by Bukharin,” this focus was identified:

A work such as the “Popular Study”, destined for a reading public which is not intellectual by profession, ought to have taken as its starting point a critical analysis of the philosophy of common sense, which is the “philosophy of the non-philosopher”, that is to say, the world conception absorbed uncritically by various social and cultural circles in which the moral individuality of the average man is developed.<sup>585</sup>

This interpretative line has not been suggested elsewhere.<sup>586</sup> Taylor’s hermeneutical phenomenology enables him to write this critical genealogy that shames any ideas that are incompatible with his ideology of Socialist Humanism as contributing to “Secularity 3”.

Again, Gramsci provided the template:

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<sup>584</sup> *MPOW*, 137.

<sup>585</sup> *MPOW*, 90.

<sup>586</sup> Compare this account with Ruth Abbey, “Theorizing Secularity 3: Authenticity, Ontology, Fragilization,” in *Aspiring to Fullness in a Secular Age: Essays on Religion and Theology in the Work of Charles Taylor*, eds. C. D. Colorado and J. D. Klassen, 98–124 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014).

The Modern Prince, in developing itself, changes the system of intellectual and moral relations, since its development means precisely that every act is conceived as useful or harmful, as virtuous or wicked, only in so far as it has the Modern Prince itself as a point of reference and helps to increase its power or oppose it.<sup>587</sup>

Calvin's theology, specifically his Augustinian anthropology, with its unflinching account of innate human depravity and selfishness, makes the collectivist emancipatory hopes of Socialist Humanists look severely misguided. Calvinism also represents a vital root of modern economic and social life. Adam Smith (1723–1790), baptised a Presbyterian and raised in the Church of Scotland, based his economic theory (as is well known) on the notion that human beings are fundamentally self-interested. Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), and John Locke (1632–1704)—all of whom Taylor engages in *A Secular Age*—similarly developed their social theories in intellectual-historical contexts heavily inflected by Calvinism, and with the foundational assumption that human beings are self-interested creatures. All these figures, Calvin, Hobbes, Grotius, Locke, and Smith contributed in crucial ways to “Secularity 3”, Taylor claims. The irony is that the first modern atheistic regime in the West came to Catholic France in 1789, where this social theory had not taken root (*The Wealth of Nations* was only published in 1776). Protestant Britain, on the other hand, even still retains an official affiliation with Christianity, and Christian belief and practice only began to seriously decline in the 1960s.<sup>588</sup>

Now that some of the distorting effects of this ideological influence on Taylor's historical writing have been demonstrated, the question remains: what happens in his hermeneutic process? How does he interpret Calvin's sacramental theology as secularizing the “background”?

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<sup>587</sup> *MPOW*, 140.

<sup>588</sup> Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2009).

In 1979, Taylor contributed an essay titled “Atomism” to a volume in honour of the Canadian political scientist and neo-Marxist social theorist, C. B. Macpherson (1911–1987); other contributors included Christopher Hill and E. J. Hobsbawm (1917–2012).<sup>589</sup> After reading Hill’s essay in this volume, “Covenant Theology and the Concept of ‘A Public Person’”, Taylor’s interpretation of Reformed sacramental theology appears much less original:

Now the protestant emphasis on faith as against works, its *denial that sacraments are the vehicles of grace, spiritualizes worship and strips it of its symbolical-magical-materialist character*. Protestant sacramental doctrine bears the same relation to medieval catholic doctrine as credit does to a metal currency, Marx long ago pointed out. Faith becomes the more important as external material aids to grace (the counters of salvation) lose their usefulness. The relationship between God and man is direct, and emphasis is placed upon promises, mutual covenants between the two parties.<sup>590</sup>

Then Hill’s essay concluded:

If I am right, then the doctrine of the public person may have had at least a negative influence on Hobbes, making him think out more carefully his own theory of representation. And *from there modern political thinking begins*.<sup>591</sup>

Taylor’s narration from Calvin, through Hobbes, Grotius, and Locke to Smith, tracing the development of “Secularity 3”, repeatedly criticized a single aspect of modern Western life and thought: abstraction. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx argued that the intellectual abstraction of life alienates humanity from itself—from the experience of being fully human—as these abstractions refract humanity’s contact with the world through various forms of alienating mediations.<sup>592</sup> The ultimate abstraction that

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<sup>589</sup> Charles Taylor, “Atomism” in *Powers, Possessions, and Freedom: Essays in Honour of C. B. Macpherson*, 39–61, ed. Alkis Kontos (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979).

<sup>590</sup> Christopher Hill, “Covenant Theology and the Concept of ‘A Public Person’,” in *Powers, Possessions, and Freedom*, 3–22, 5. Emphasis added.

<sup>591</sup> Hill, “Covenant Theology,” in *Powers, Possessions, and Freedom*, 22. Emphasis added.

<sup>592</sup> Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. Dirk Struik (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970), 186, 188, 189, 192.

alienated humanity from itself was, according to Marx, the abstract value of money. For its abstract promise came to mediate all resources and relationships.<sup>593</sup>

In Taylor's narrative tracing the emergence of "Secularity 3", Calvin's contribution was to profoundly reformulate the liturgical praxis at the heart of European culture. In Calvin's Reformed sacramental theology, God's grace is ostensibly abstracted by intellectualization as the Lord's Supper is taken, thereby constituting an inaugural step in the long march to the Western alienation from life in the modern "atomistic" liberal-capitalist order. Early modern political theory—by formulating interpersonal relations as "contracts"—intellectualized and abstracted the social life of the community. Smith's economic theory intellectualized and abstracted value itself. For Marx, as the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* testify, even atheism was in some sense an alienating abstraction that social life in Communism would overcome as the "negation of the negation".<sup>594</sup>

This utopian conclusion that realizing Communism would overcome humanity's supposed "alienation" in modern economic and social life was so extreme that it is difficult to take seriously, perhaps making it implausible to think that Taylor could be so influenced by such ideas; especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the so-called "End of History" smugness on the economic Right.<sup>595</sup> Perhaps dismissive attitudes towards Marx and Marxism on the right fail to recognise the difference between the Old and New Left. In his essay, "Born-Again Socialism," Raphael Samuel recorded that the political value of Taylor's discovery of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* for the British New Left was that "we found in 'alienation' a term which spoke to people who felt themselves 'outsiders' in British society."<sup>596</sup> The New Left address a much broader range of social and existential concerns than antiquated notions of the economic oppression of the proletariat: Marx's early

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<sup>593</sup> Ibid., 165–166.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>595</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992).

<sup>596</sup> Raphael Samuel, "Born-Again Socialism," in *Out of Apathy*, 39–57, 43.

writing could also be taken in a religious sense. For Marx had argued that capitalist thinking transformed “*Man’s species being*, both nature and his spiritual species property, into a being *alien* to him, into a *means* to his *individual existence*. It estranges from man his own body, as well as external nature and his spiritual essence, his *human being*.”<sup>597</sup> These are the seeds of Marx’s collectivist humanism; readers with a religious sensibility, like Taylor, can relate to his critique of capitalism for alienating humanity from its “spiritual essence” and wish to draw from his theory of alienation to formulate a conception of human flourishing that is apparently more attuned to modern life: i.e., a neo-Marxist vision of a “communion of saints”. Charting this path to “fullness”, Taylor is not strictly writing a narrative of unbelief *per se* but identifying and tracing a modern Western sense of alienation— which is a ubiquitous mode of awareness produced by a long process of intellectualizing abstractions. Hence he wrote in the *Universities and Left Review* after returning from Paris: “SOONER or later, any Socialism worth its salt must come to grips with the problems of alienation.”<sup>598</sup>

Taylor’s essay, “Overcoming Epistemology”, contains a discreet but illuminating reference that indicated how Merleau-Ponty’s thought “daws more explicitly political connections and clarifies the alternative notion of freedom that arises from the critique of empiricism and intellectualism.”<sup>599</sup> Taylor’s footnote directs the reader to chapter three, part three (“Freedom”) of the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Reading there, one finds that the more explicitly political connections Merleau-Ponty draws relate to the limitations of both scientific and idealist conceptualizations of what spurs the proletariat to revolutionary activity: “Objective thought deduces class consciousness from the objective condition of the proletariat. Idealist reflection reduces the proletarian condition to the proletarian’s

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<sup>597</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 114.

<sup>598</sup> Charles Taylor, “Alienation and Community,” *Universities and Left Review*, no. 5 (1958): 11–18, 11. Capital letters original.

<sup>599</sup> Taylor, “Overcoming Epistemology” in *Philosophical Arguments*, 8fn13.

consciousness of that condition.”<sup>600</sup> Drawing from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Merleau-Ponty criticised both approaches. “In both cases, we are operating on the level of abstraction, because we remain within the alternative between the in-itself and the for-itself.”<sup>601</sup> Instead, Merleau-Ponty suggested that “we adopt a truly existential method,” then, “we” will find:

Rather, “I exist as a worker” or “I exist as a bourgeois” first, and this mode of communication with the world and society motivates both my revolutionary or conservative projects and my explicit judgements (“I am a worker,” or “I am a bourgeois”), without it being the case that I can deduce the former from the latter, nor the latter from the former. Neither the economy nor society, taken as a system of impersonal forces, determine me as a proletarian, but rather society or the economy such as I bear them within myself and such as I live them; nor is it, for that matter, an intellectual operation without any motive, but rather my way of being in the world within this institutional framework.<sup>602</sup>

In this extract, Merleau-Ponty articulated an existential phenomenology of class in the Marxist tradition: a person’s class is formed by “society or the economy such as I bear them within myself and such as I live them”, it is not primarily “an intellectual operation” but rather “my way of being in the world within this institutional framework.” Perhaps this could be called: “*Proletariat 3*”; if “*Proletariat 1*” is the proletarian condition as designated objectively by the conditions in society; and “*Proletariat 2*” is one’s subjective will to recognise oneself as proletarian; then “*Proletariat 3*” examines one’s intuitive grasp and way of being in the world as proletarian. From Merleau-Ponty, Charles Taylor, as “a sort of Catholic Marxist”, appropriated the phenomenological approach that determines his notion of “Secularity 3” in his “Reform Master Narrative” of Western culture that relates an implicit critique of the alienating effects of capitalism. In this Master Narrative of Alienation, his

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<sup>600</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 468.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid., 469.

interpretation of Calvin as disenchanting the eucharist follows Karl Marx's critique of the abstraction and intellectualization of *life*.

#### JOHN CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

In the cacophony of grand narratives of Western secularization, several contemporary accounts chime the same note in harmony: John Calvin disenchanting the eucharist. In *A Secular Age*, Calvin's theology of the Supper came in a long line of movements to Reform, expressions of a "rage for order" that pulses through Western culture from the Fourth Lateran Council, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, to the French Revolution, and the Bolshevik Revolution, which manifest the disenchanting tendency implicit in ancient Judaism and the Axial Revolution. The Radical Orthodoxy cohort of writers—especially Graham Ward and Simon Oliver—emplot the transition from medieval nominalism to secular modernity with attention to Calvin's eucharistic thought as prefiguring a naturalised vision of the cosmos in intellectual-historical analyses adjacent to Taylor's more phenomenological Reform Master Narrative.<sup>603</sup> Brad Gregory's argument in *The Unintended Reformation* (2012) broadly concurs. Gregory distances his genealogical history of Western secularism from both Taylor's narrative and the "so-called Radical Orthodoxy theologians"; although he shares in their critical assessment of metaphysical univocity and nominalism, Gregory perceives the disintegration of the monolithic Catholic Church as fomenting an epistemic authority crisis that facilitated the triumph of instrumental reason given its tangible payoffs, and the pragmatic marginalisation of questions concerning ultimate meaning.<sup>604</sup>

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<sup>603</sup> Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000), esp. 156–166; Simon Oliver, "The Eucharist Before Nature and Culture," *Modern Theology*, vol. 15, no. 3 (1999): 331–353. For Radical Orthodoxy's alignment with Taylor's Reform Master Narrative: *ASA*, 773–776.

<sup>604</sup> Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How A Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 400fn26. See also, Brad Gregory, "The Intentions of the Unintended Reformation," *Historically Speaking*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2012): 2–5: "At the heart of the narrative

These thinkers are contemporary luminaries: Gregory is an alumnus of the Harvard Society of Fellows; Ward is Regius Professor of Divinity and Canon at Christ Church, Oxford. Their scholarly discussion of Reformed eucharistic thought concerns the development and outworking of medieval theology in early modernity, and the philosophical implications of Calvin's doctrine of the Supper as it influenced Western culture subsequently. As such, their narratives are necessarily vast and sweeping. Gregory is candid about his historiographical subjectivity in *The Unintended Reformation*: "this book's experimental analysis of the past is highly targeted. It is self-consciously selective and, one might say, *extractive*."<sup>605</sup> He explains that,

it rests on judgements about what in the past has been most influential in making life in Europe and North America what it is today, beginning in the Middle Ages...Such judgements are of course subject to criticism like any others. Different historians might argue for alternative aspects of the past as most influential in shaping the present, and/or for different ways of interpreting them.... "Genealogical history" or perhaps "analytical history" seem equally fitting names for the endeavour embodied in this study.<sup>606</sup>

This methodological disclaimer introduces an important limitation of his macro-historical survey of Western history that claims to explain the emergence of modern secularism. It rests admittedly on contestable subjective judgements about the subterranean influence of certain ideas, not on the empirical demonstration of the direct and immediate effect of those ideas. Accordingly, *The Unintended Reformation* tends to narrate historical change by rhetorically associating certain ideas—taking what Ueli Zahnd has called "historical shortcuts"—rather than with contextualised theories of historical causation sensitive to diverse social and geographical factors.<sup>607</sup>

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is the Reformation era because its unresolved doctrinal disagreements and concrete religio-political disruptions are the key to answering the book's central question."

<sup>605</sup> Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 4. Emphasis original.

<sup>606</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–5.

<sup>607</sup> Ueli Zahnd, "Calvin, Calvinism, and Medieval Thought" in *The Oxford Handbook of Calvin and Calvinism*, 26–42, eds. Bruce Gordon and Carl R. Trueman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 39.

For example, consider Gregory's broad argument that in the Reformers' sacramental theology, "some of their departures from the traditional Christian view seem to have implied univocal metaphysical assumptions in ways that probably did contribute to an eventual conception of a disenchanted natural world."<sup>608</sup> This is one such sweeping and contestable judgement about the subterranean influence of Reformed theology in producing modern secularism; it is contestable at several points. Which departures specifically? What is the normative "traditional" view? How widely and sincerely held was the "traditional" view? How did Reformed departures *imply* metaphysical univocity? In what specific *ways* did they contribute to disenchantment? Just how *probable* is the causal relationship? In the detail of his genealogy, Gregory suggests that the Reformers rejected the "comprehensive, biblical view of reality in which the transcendent God manifests himself in and through the natural, material world."<sup>609</sup> This is a misguided polemical claim, not an evidence-based argument.<sup>610</sup> Even if Reformed Protestants apprehended God in the world differently to pious medieval Catholics, the tenuous rhetorical association of Reformed spirituality with a disenchanted outlook does not demonstrate intellectual-historical causation.

Taylor and Ward have engaged the methodological problem of tracing the causal links between intellectual and cultural history more compellingly in their writings.<sup>611</sup> Working from his exceptional background in social theory and existential phenomenology, Taylor has theorised how ideas are transmitted at the popular level through embodied practices that then condition and create a collective experience and interpretation of the world. The eucharist was the liturgical practice at the heart of medieval Europe, and Taylor claims that with Calvin the sacrament was desacralized, which produced a secularizing shift

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<sup>608</sup> Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 41.

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>610</sup> See Bruce Gordon's bemusement at this claim in his "Response to Brad Gregory," *Historically Speaking*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2012): 8–10.

<sup>611</sup> *SS*, esp. 199–207; Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

in how Reformed Protestants apprehended and interacted with the world. Therefore, in his historical phenomenology of *die Entzauberung der Welt*, famously associated with Calvinism by Max Weber (1864–1920), Taylor contends that the Reformation was an “engine of disenchantment”.<sup>612</sup> Philosophically sophisticated as this theoretical discussion of the causal nexus between intellectual and cultural history seems, Taylor’s phenomenology of secularization claims to trace the subliminal aspects of historical lived experience—the object of his study is the intuitive “background” for Western subjectivity: what follows considers where his hermeneutical projection of this “background” is discordant with the evidence from Calvin’s doctrine of the Supper.<sup>613</sup>

Considerable scholarship has traced the development of Calvin’s theology of the Supper through the various phases of sixteenth-century eucharistic controversy.<sup>614</sup> Yet the two ideas relevant for this historiography of secularization were basic fixtures of his eucharistic thought from the beginning: Christ’s body cannot be physically in the elements because Christ’s finite human body is located in heaven, and the Holy Supper is sacred as the sign by which God offers Christ’s body and blood to the visible church for the spiritual nourishment of believers. This chapter draws Calvin’s theology of the Supper into responsive dialogue with Taylor, Ward, Oliver, and Gregory in three ways: first, by critically

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<sup>612</sup> ASA, 77; Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2001). On the other hand, Gregory’s theoretical commitments, outlined in “Can We ‘See Things Their Way’? Should We Try?” in *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion*, 24–45, eds. Alister Chapman, John Coffey, and Brad Gregory (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), includes a commitment to historical empathy that presumably led him to cite Calvin’s doctrine of providence and comment, ‘Protestantism as such did not disenchant the world’; Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 41.

<sup>613</sup> ASA, 13–14.

<sup>614</sup> See Thomas J. Davis, *The Clearest Promises of God: The Development of Calvin’s Eucharistic Teaching* (New York: AMS Press, 1995); Thomas J. Davis, *This Is My Body: The Presence of Christ in Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); Wim Janse, “Calvin’s Eucharistic Theology: Three Dogma-Historical Observations,” in *Calvinus Sacramentum Literarum Interpretes*, 37–69, ed. Herman Selderhuis (Göttingen: 2008); Wim Janse, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper,” *Perichoresis* vol. 10, no. 2 (2012): 137–163; Amy Nelson Burnett, “The Eucharist” in *John Calvin in Context*, 240–248, ed. R. Ward Holder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Amy Nelson Burnett, “John Calvin and the First Eucharistic Controversy” in *Calvin and the Early Reformation*, 180–199, eds. Brian C. Brewer and David M. Whitford (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

assessing the hermeneutical underpinnings and empirical viability of Taylor’s claim that Calvin “disenchanted” the sacrament; second, by engaging both Taylor and the Radical Orthodoxy writers on the subject of Calvin’s semiotic theory and the topic of the *manducatio indignorum*; and third, by briefly addressing the apparent relationship between metaphysical univocity, nominalism, and Western secularism as it relates to Calvin’s doctrine of the Lord’s Supper.

## I

In *A Secular Age*, Taylor interprets Calvin’s “disenchanted” theology as emancipatory—as working to set humanity free from external magical forces, a step in the long march towards the free, self-defining subjectivity which characterises life in Western modernity.<sup>615</sup> In this way, his reading of Calvin concerned the question that gave *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* its centre of gravity. Indeed, as early as his study of *Hegel*, Taylor distilled what he perceived as a central and distinguishing feature of modern civil life in the context of Western history: “the modern subject is self-defining,” he explained, “where on previous views the subject is defined in relation to a cosmic order.”<sup>616</sup> This change—from human subjectivity defined in relation to the cosmic order and effected by magical or spiritual forces, to free self-definition in a naturalised world—its history, and especially its contemporary political implications, have concerned him throughout his career.<sup>617</sup> With reference to that concern and its associated dilemmas, Taylor has articulated his understanding of Calvin’s role in this historical process with consistency. In *Hegel* he argued that the trend towards self-defining subjectivity was an elite philosophical movement largely facilitated by the scientific insights of Francis Bacon (1561–1626). But non-elites derived

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<sup>615</sup> *ASA*, 77–80.

<sup>616</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 6.

<sup>617</sup> “We need at once freedom and a post-industrial *Sittlichkeit*.” Taylor, *Hegel*, 461. Cf. Taylor, *The Pattern of Politics*, 124.

their sense of self through relation to a larger cosmic order, he explained, “carried by their religious consciousness,” and “most powerfully...by their sense of the sacred...the heightened presence of the divine in certain privileged places, times and actions.”<sup>618</sup> As early as this 1975 work, Taylor wrote that “Protestantism and particularly Calvinism” took this view of the world, “classed it with idolatry”, and “waged unconditional war on it.”<sup>619</sup> His assessment of Calvin in the context of this overall trend is stated lucidly in *Hegel*:

It is probable that the unremitting struggle to desacralize the world in the name of an undivided devotion to God waged by Calvin and his followers helped to destroy the sense that the creation was a locus of meanings in relation to which man had to define himself. Of course the aim of this exercise was very far from forging the self-defining subject, but rather that the believer depend alone on God. But with the waning of Protestant piety, the desacralized world helped to foster its correlative human subjectivity, which now reaped a harvest sown originally for its creator.<sup>620</sup>

For Hegel, the end of history was Absolute Spirit’s coming to rational self-awareness in and through embodied subjectivity.<sup>621</sup> Taylor’s historical writing reflects an attenuated conception of this progressivist epistemology and metaphysical vitalism, where the twists of history and the cunning of reason through Calvin’s religious drive to “desacralize” meant that “human subjectivity...reaped a harvest sown originally for its creator.”<sup>622</sup> Unintentionally and unpredictably, Calvin’s religious zeal for God’s glory drove towards secular humanism—by freeing humanity from magic and myth, and leading to the realization that the this-worldly flourishing of the human subject is the *summum bonum*. Over thirty years later in *A Secular Age*, Taylor delineated this same understanding in his Reform Master Narrative of Western secularization:

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<sup>618</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 9.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid.

<sup>621</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

<sup>622</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 9.

The Reformation as Reform is central to the story I want to tell—that of the abolition of the enchanted cosmos, and the eventual creation of a humanist alternative to faith.<sup>623</sup>

This twofold teleology of attenuated Hegelianism is the hermeneutical engine for his assessment of Calvin's eucharistic thought. It drives his reading of Calvin as a "desacralizer": "First, disenchantment. We can see the immense energy behind the denial of the sacred, if we look at Calvin."<sup>624</sup> Taylor's interpretation of Calvin on this point is worth quoting at length:

This [Calvin's theology] now changes the centre of gravity of the religious life. The power of God doesn't operate through various "sacramentals", or locations of sacred power which we can draw on. These are seen to be something which we can control, and hence blasphemous. In one way, we can say that the sacred/profane distinction breaks down, insofar as it can be placed in person, time, space, gesture. This means that the sacred is suddenly broadened: for the saved, God is sanctifying us everywhere, hence also in ordinary life, our work, in marriage, and so on.<sup>625</sup>

In an interview discussing the reception of *A Secular Age*, Taylor has commented that, "obviously Calvin is not one of my strong points. So I recognise that there are lots of things missing here".<sup>626</sup> It seems that Calvin's theology of the sacred is one such lacuna; for this claim that Calvin denied the sacred is not warranted given the evidence from his ministry.<sup>627</sup> As early as the first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536), Calvin wrote pastorally of the Lord's Supper, "let us remember that this sacred feast is medicine for the sick, solace for sinners, alms to the poor".<sup>628</sup> By the final edition of the *Institutes* (1559), Calvin had written that in the sacrament, Jesus Christ "proffers that sacred blood for us to

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<sup>623</sup> ASA, 77.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid.

<sup>625</sup> ASA, 79. Taylor's argument is also outlined in *SS*, 214–218, where he traces the rise of Western modernity's "bourgeois" ethic' from 'a theological point of origin.' Specifically, '[t]he affirmation of ordinary life [which] finds its origin in Judaeo-Christian spirituality, and the particular impetus it receives in the modern era comes first of all from the Reformation.'

<sup>626</sup> Taylor and Smith, "'Why Do I See the World So Differently?'" Q&A."

<sup>627</sup> See also, Ezra Plank, "Domesticating God: Reformed Homes and the Relocation of Sacred Space," in *Emancipating Calvin: Culture and Confessional Identity in Francophone Reformed Communities*, 210–229, eds. Karen E. Spierling, Erik A. de Boer, and R. Ward Holder (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

<sup>628</sup> *CO* 1, col. 128.

taste.”<sup>629</sup> When Calvin and Guillaume Farel (1489–1565) began their initial work of reforming the Genevan church, they communicated four priorities to the Council in their *Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church in Geneva* (1537), first: “it is certain that a Church cannot be said to be well ordered and regulated unless in it the Holy Supper of our Lord is always being celebrated and frequented, and this under such good supervision that no one dare presume to present himself unless devoutly, and with genuine reverence for it.”<sup>630</sup> They related this to the biblical injunction to excommunicate the ungodly and bar them from the Lord’s Table. At the heart of their commitment to church discipline was their conviction that this “sacred” communion should not be “profaned”, “polluted”, or “contaminated”.<sup>631</sup> With regards to embodied liturgical practice, the sacred/profane distinction had not “broken down”. It is reflected vividly in Calvin’s eucharistic rite, where upon administering the sacrament he stated, “by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, I excommunicate all idolators...declaring to them that they must abstain from this holy table, for fear of polluting and contaminating the sacred viands which our Lord Jesus Christ gives only to his household and believers.”<sup>632</sup> This concern was also transmitted pedagogically in Calvin’s *Catechism of the Church in Geneva* (1542):

Child: ...in the Supper the minister ought to take heed not to give it to anyone who is clearly unworthy of receiving it.

Minister: Why so?

Child: Because it cannot be done without insulting and profaning the sacrament.<sup>633</sup>

Similarly, in a polemical invective contained in his *Petite Traicté de la Sainte Cène* (1541), Calvin had described the theology of the Mass—specifically the notion of grace *ex opera operato*—as “an evident profanation of the Supper of Christ,” and as a “farce” unworthy of

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<sup>629</sup> CO 2, col. 1003.

<sup>630</sup> CO 10, cols. 5–6.

<sup>631</sup> CO 10, col. 8.

<sup>632</sup> *La forme des prières et chants ecclésiastiques* in CO 6, col. 198.

<sup>633</sup> CO 6, col. 133.

the “sacred Supper of our Lord.”<sup>634</sup> In this treatise, Calvin also explained what it meant for a congregant to sin by desecrating the Supper: “Whoever approaches the sacrament with contempt or indifference, not caring much about following when the Lord calls him, perversely abuses, and in abusing pollutes it. Now to pollute and contaminate what God has so highly sanctified, is intolerable blasphemy.”<sup>635</sup>

This concern for the sacred purity of the sacrament is also evident in his commentary on 1 Corinthians (1546), where Calvin paraphrased 1 Cor. 11:27 to contend for his exegesis: “‘God,’ says he, ‘will not allow this sacrament to be profaned without punishing it severely.’”<sup>636</sup> And later, Calvin glossed the teaching in 1 Cor. 11:29, on the condemnation of those who eat the Supper unworthily: “He [Paul] adds the reason—because they distinguish not the Lord’s body, that is, as a sacred thing from the profane.”<sup>637</sup> Preaching on this passage ten years later in the summer of 1556, Calvin warned his hearers, “This is to frighten many who are asleep in their carelessness, so much that they have no qualms about profaning a thing so holy and sacred as our Lord’s Supper...do not find it strange that those who pollute the Supper of our Lord are held guilty of his body and blood”.<sup>638</sup> The printer Conrad Badius (1520–1562) amplified Calvin’s theology of the Supper through several editions of his sermons, including these sermons on 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, selected for the clarity with which they expressed his sacramental thought, and a selection of Christological sermons, some of which were Communion sermons, where Calvin’s preaching was, “naturally more vehement and intense.”<sup>639</sup> His Communion preaching conveyed the same pastoral concern extemporaneously to the congregation. Speaking on

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<sup>634</sup> *CO* 5, col. 455.

<sup>635</sup> *CO* 5, col. 441.

<sup>636</sup> *CO* 49, col. 491.

<sup>637</sup> *CO* 49, col. 493.

<sup>638</sup> *CO* 49, cols. 805–806. Elsie Ann McKee has dated this sermon to the evening service on 16 August 1556, *The Pastoral Ministry and Worship in Calvin’s Geneva* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2016), 916.

<sup>639</sup> Arjen Terlouw, “‘Naturally More Vehement and Intense’: Vehemence in Calvin’s Sermons on the Lord’s Supper,” *Reformation & Renaissance Review* vol. 20, no. 1 (2018): 70–81.

Acts 1:1–4 at the September Communion service in 1549, Calvin related the point of the Lord’s bodily ascension to his theology of the Supper:

There are many who know that Jesus Christ is not in this bread and wine, but yet where is their heart? The hearts of some will be steeped in avarice, others will be intoxicated with ambition, the hearts of others will be twisted in all vileness...what saint Paul calls earthly members to the Colossians [Col. 3:5]. If you want to approach Jesus Christ, you must leave your earthly members. And what? Should we leave our hands and feet? No, but our obscenity, greed, ambition, cravings, spitefulness, and all other pollution. Are we there to seek Jesus Christ on high? We must be rid of all these earthly members. For what agreement would there be between them and Jesus Christ? We must not mix his presence with our pollutions, but go to his presence so that he removes them from us.<sup>640</sup>

By illustrating Calvin’s soteriological vision for embodied purification and moral transformation through the Supper, this homiletical exhortation offers parallel insight into the appropriate sense of so-called “excarnation” that Taylor perceives as disenchanting Reform in Calvin’s theology, namely: “the steady disembodiment of spiritual life, so that it is less and less carried in deeply meaningful bodily forms, and lies more and more ‘in the head’.”<sup>641</sup>

Simon Oliver levelled this critique more aggressively, suggesting that Calvin conceived of the Christian life as “a spiritualized and gnostic existence that lacks any genuine notion of corporeality”.<sup>642</sup> Indeed Oliver contended that Calvin understood the relationship between grace and the body, “not in terms of a fallen corporeal ‘nature’ requiring transformation, but in terms of a necessary transcending of the gory messiness of the flesh in a technologically or spiritually rarefied version of Christianity.”<sup>643</sup> These are highly distorted readings; Calvin’s true understanding of “excarnation” is clear from the quotation above: “Should we leave our hands and feet? No, but our obscenity, greed,

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<sup>640</sup> CO 48, col. 595. McKee dates the sermon to 1 September 1549, *The Pastoral Ministry and Worship in Calvin’s Geneva*, 908.

<sup>641</sup> ASA, 614, 771.

<sup>642</sup> Oliver, “The Eucharist Before Nature and Culture,” 343.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid.

ambition, cravings, spitefulness, and all other pollution.” He was certainly preaching against *carnality*, but in the Pauline sense of “the flesh” as representative of humanity’s fallen sinful nature. He was not diminishing the goodness of the created body. On the contrary, Calvin taught that by faith in Jesus Christ’s pure and holy sacrifice of his body, which was the atonement exhibited to the senses in the Supper, divine grace could cleanse and save a body defiled by sin. In this example, Calvin’s homiletical rhetoric stressed that notions of disembodiment are ridiculous. J. Todd Billings has observed that in Calvin’s Commentary on Genesis (1554), the material sign of God’s goodness was held forth to humanity in the pre-lapsarian state *via* the Tree of Life, therefore Billings insightfully recognises that “part of the created structure for a human way of knowing God, according to Calvin, involves not just hearing, but seeing, touching, tasting.”<sup>644</sup>

Far from diminishing the value or significance of the body, Calvin stressed the importance of the materiality of the sacraments for strengthening the believer’s faith. Moreover, Calvin’s appreciation for the soteriological metaphor of being grafted into the body of Christ was an important aspect of his theology of the Supper. In a letter to Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562), written 8 August 1555, Calvin described “the mystery which is our communication with Christ”.<sup>645</sup> He wrote of believers being “merged into his [Christ’s] body” and receiving his Spirit: “this is the communion which they perceive in the sacred Supper.”<sup>646</sup> Calvin often used the language of Ephesians 5:30 to describe this Communion with Christ in the Supper, “we are members of his body, of his flesh, of his bones.” His *Confessio Fidei de Eucharista* (1537) invoked this phrase, and so did his response to the Lutheran theologian Tilemann Heshusius (1527–1588), *De Vera*

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<sup>644</sup> J. Todd Billings, “John Calvin and the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper: A Contemporary Appraisal” in *Restoration Through Redemption: John Calvin Revisited*, 171–184, ed. Henk van den Belt (Leiden: Brill, 2013). Citing CO 23, cols. 38, 79.

<sup>645</sup> CO 15, col. 722.

<sup>646</sup> CO 15, col. 724.

*Participatione Carnis et Sanguinis Christi in Sacra Coena* (1561).<sup>647</sup> Reference to Eph. 5:30 also occurred in the *Institutes*, and in a Communion sermon, where Calvin described how Christ “makes us flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones” through the Supper.<sup>648</sup> Commenting on the metaphysics of Calvin’s Christology in his eucharistic controversy with the Lutheran theologians, Heshusius and Joachim Westphal (1510–1574), Richard Cross discerns and reiterates the importance of this point for Calvin, that Christ’s life-giving flesh is given substantially to believers in the Supper, and “conjoins us with his members”.<sup>649</sup> As Cross notes, Calvin asked in this polemical context: “Does he who denies that the body of Christ is eaten by the mouth, take away the substance of his body from the sacred Supper?”<sup>650</sup> The coherence of this metaphysical outlook is considered below, but Calvin’s stress on the believer’s substantial union with Christ expressed through this vivid language of being made “flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone” gives insight into his estimation of the Supper as “a sacred treasure of infinite value” according to the *Confession des Escholiers* (1559).<sup>651</sup> Furthermore, the *Confession of Faith in the Name of the Reformed Churches in France* (1562), repeated the point that those who eat the bread and drink the wine of the Supper unworthily are condemned for “not having discerned between them and profane things.”<sup>652</sup>

From this sampling of his *oeuvre*, it should be clear that in the *Institutes* as well as his commentaries, confessions, catechisms, liturgical prayers, sermons, letters, and treatises, Calvin apprehended, taught, and maintained that an objective sacred/profane distinction was

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<sup>647</sup> *CO* 9, cols. 771, 521.

<sup>648</sup> *CO* 2, col. 1009; *CO* 46, col. 98, cited in Christian Grosse, “‘Le mystère de communiquer à Jésus-Christ’ ; Sermons de communion à Genève au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle,” in *Annoncer l’Évangile. Permanences et mutations de la prédiction. Actes du colloque international de Strasbourg (20-22 novembre 2003)*, 161–182, ed. Matthew Arnold (Paris: Cerf, 2003), 182.

<sup>649</sup> Richard Cross, *Communicatio Idiomatum: Reformation Christological Debates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 138, citing *CO* 37, col. 72.

<sup>650</sup> *Ibid.*, citing *CO* 37, col. 470.

<sup>651</sup> *CO* 9, col. 729.

<sup>652</sup> *CO* 9, col. 768.

exhibited in the Supper. Furthermore, the stress his preaching laid on the week of preparation before the Supper, and that sins committed shortly before or after the Supper were considered more heinous and disciplined more severely by the consistory demonstrates that the time around the Supper was considered sacred and not to be profaned with wickedness.<sup>653</sup> As Jeffrey Watt, Christian Grosse, Robert Kingdon, and Amy Nelson Burnett have observed, these concerns that Calvin and other Reformers shared were in continuity with medieval emphases on eucharistic sanctity.<sup>654</sup> Moreover, even on Taylor's theory regarding the formation of the social imaginary through praxis, this social discipline would have served to enforce/reinforce the collective sense of the sacred.

It is also important to remain cognizant of Richard Muller's injunction to recognise the complexity and diversity of early modern Reformed thought, which is apparent in Reformed perceptions of the sacred in a way that complicates notions of Calvin monopolising the tradition. Grosse has highlighted this with reference to the *Second Helvetic Confession* (1566), composed by the Zurich theologian Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575) and adopted in Geneva:

[W]e know that on account of God's Word and sacred use places dedicated to God and his worship are not profane, but holy, and that those who are present in them are to conduct themselves reverently and modestly, seeing that they are in a sacred place, in the presence of God and his holy angels.<sup>655</sup>

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<sup>653</sup> CO 46, col. 258: 'Et quand nous viendrons Dimanche prochain à la Cène, que ce ne soit pas pour polluer ceste sainte table qui est dediee pour nostre salut. Car beaucoup y viennent, helas, ne sçachans pourquoy un tel Sacrement a este institué, de quel bien il leur sert, et quel profit nous en recevons. Il y en viendra donc là, qui iettent le museau sur ceste table. Or il leur coustera bien cher d'avoir ainsi profané le corps et le sang de nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ.' Cf. Jeffrey R. Watt, *The Consistory and Social Discipline in Calvin's Geneva* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2020), 214–218.

<sup>654</sup> Ibid.; Robert Kingdon, "Worship in Geneva Before and After the Reformation" in *Worship in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Change and Continuity in Religious Practice*, 41–60, eds. Karin Maag and John D. Witvliet (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004); Christian Grosse, *Les Rituels De La Cène : Le Culte Eucharistique Réformé à Genève (XVIe–XVIIe Siècles)* (Genève: Droz, 2008); Amy Nelson Burnett, "The Social History of Communion and the Reformation of the Eucharist," *Past and Present* vol. 211 (2011): 77–119.

<sup>655</sup> Christian Grosse, "Places of Sanctification: The Liturgical Sacrality of Genevan Reformed Churches, 1535–1566" in *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*, 60–80, eds. Will Coster and Andrew Spicer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 65.

Irrespective of Calvin's teaching to "guard against" imbuing church buildings "with some secret holiness or other, which would render prayer more sacred to God...since we ourselves are God's true temples", it became the confessional stance of the Genevan church to affirm that church buildings are "a sacred place".<sup>656</sup> The immediate development of the Reformed tradition in Geneva after Calvin's death does not cohere with Taylor's claim that the sacred/profane distinction "broke down" with regards to space.

Finally, Reformed Protestant apprehension of the sacred/profane distinction in the Supper was enduring, and took root in other cultures. In the late seventeenth century, the Genevan Professor of Theology Francis Turretin (1623–1687) wrote that the consecrated elements are "transferred from a common and natural use and brought over to a sacred and mystical use."<sup>657</sup> Leigh E. Schmidt has also observed that Reformed Communion services were often central to times of spiritual revival for Presbyterians in Scotland and America into the nineteenth century.<sup>658</sup> The theology of the Supper that drove these periods of spiritual intensity rebounded the teaching of Calvin and other Reformers; as the Scottish theologian John Willison (1680–1750) echoed their doctrine, "Mouths that are polluted by swearing and evil speaking...are not fit to eat and drink the sacred symbols of Christ's body and blood."<sup>659</sup> Describing the importance of the Supper during the revival that occurred in America between 1790 and 1810, Reverend James McGready (1763–1817) recorded, "Our Sacramental occasions are days of the Son of Man indeed, and are usually marked with the visible footsteps of Jehovah's majesty and glory...the people of God were so filled with such extatic [sic] raptures of divine joy and comfort, that I could compare it to nothing else

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<sup>656</sup> *CO 2*, cols. 657–658. Cf. Plank, "Domesticating God," 221.

<sup>657</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 3, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1997), 436.

<sup>658</sup> Leigh E. Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

<sup>659</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

than the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth.”<sup>660</sup> Whatever one makes of this account, written in 1803, it does not reflect a “disenchanted” outlook.

In *The Power of the Sacred: An Alternative to the Narrative of Disenchantment* (2021), Hans Joas makes the point that it is inappropriate to perceive Protestantism as disenchanted or disenchanting: “even Calvin’s view of the world and of history entails a cosmic struggle between God and the Devil, a struggle that certainly includes other forces—namely angels and demons”.<sup>661</sup> This too is reflected in his theology of the sacred Supper: “Satan, to deprive the church of this inestimable treasure, has long since spread clouds [of confusion]...to estrange the minds of simple folk from a taste for this sacred food”.<sup>662</sup> The scholarship of Robert Scribner and Alexandra Walsham has attended to similar evidence and done much to disrupt the historiographical picture of the early modern period on which Taylor’s phenomenological enchantment-disenchantment model rests.<sup>663</sup> Following in the wake of this scholarship, Joas has claimed that the evidence of religious belief and practice from the period 1500–1650, combined with the variegated history of Protestantism in the eighteenth century, including Pietism, Methodism, and the Great Awakening, through to contemporary Pentecostalism, “compels us to abandon this narrative of disenchantment.”<sup>664</sup> Further research examining the apprehension of the sacred in Protestant theology will only serve to confirm Joas’s conclusion concerning the limitations of the traditional disenchantment narrative, while demonstrating both Taylor’s misrepresentation of the Reformation as an “engine of disenchantment” and the limitations of his phenomenological method more broadly in attempting to explain the emergence of modern Western secularity.

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<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>661</sup> Hans Joas, *The Power of the Sacred: An Alternative to the Narrative of Disenchantment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 152.

<sup>662</sup> *CO* 2, col. 1002.

<sup>663</sup> Robert Scribner, “The Reformation, Popular Magic, and the ‘Disenchantment of the World’,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 23 no. 3 (1993): 475–94; Alexandra Walsham, “The Reformation and ‘the Disenchantment of the World’ Reassessed,” *The Historical Journal*, vol. 51, no. 2 (2008): 497–528.

<sup>664</sup> Joas, *The Power of the Sacred*, 152.

## II

Taylor and the Radical Orthodoxy writers develop critical readings of Calvin's semiotic theory in relation to the relativity of the sacrament's efficacy. They perceive him as denying a stable theory of eucharistic semiosis, which was a crucial philosophical development on the path to modern Western secularism. They offer bold readings of Calvin's eucharistic thought in this vein; according to Taylor in *A Secular Age*: "The whole efficacy of the sacrament is contingent on the connection between God and my faith, a speech act made and uptaken."<sup>665</sup> Ward's account in *Cities of God* (2000) aligns with Taylor's interpretation, as he comments, "to take this thing (bread/wine) as a symbol of, as a sign of, rather than simply its own self-authenticating presence, becomes a subjective act of consciousness, judgement-making."<sup>666</sup> Therefore, Ward reads the *Institutes* and concludes that in Calvin's semiotic theory: "Signs can be empty. We have to persuade ourselves that we are not deceived."<sup>667</sup> Oliver also emphasises the subjective aspect of Reformed Protestant liturgy to argue that Calvin, "spiritualizes the Eucharist in such a way that, along with his Reformation counterparts, the foundations are laid for the spiritualizing of religion and the bracketing of God by later moderns."<sup>668</sup> Oliver even claims that, "[f]or Calvin, the only intervention by God in the Eucharistic liturgy is to 'lift' the believer by the spirit to 'unite things separated by space'. So God no longer has anything to do with nature and culture and is confined to the realms of private spirituality."<sup>669</sup> Even in 2012 one commentator claimed, "Calvin resorts to a theory of signs in which the signifier is unable to signify in a stable manner."<sup>670</sup>

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<sup>665</sup> ASA, 79.

<sup>666</sup> Ward, *Cities of God*, 166.

<sup>667</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>668</sup> Oliver, "Eucharist before Culture and Nature", 344.

<sup>669</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>670</sup> Ernst van den Hemel, "Things That Matter: The Extra Calvinisticum, the Eucharist, and John Calvin's Unstable Materiality" in *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*, 62–74, eds. Dick Houtman and Birgit Meyer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 63.

These interpretations seem to misapprehend Calvin's thought in peculiar ways. Ward, for example, develops his critique based on Calvin's metonymic understanding of eucharistic signification, and decontextualizes Calvin's comment that signs are "invented by men, which are rather emblems of things absent than tokens of things present" to substantiate his claim that for Calvin, "[s]igns can be empty."<sup>671</sup> However, in context, Calvin's point was to stress the power of such human signification to function metonymically and thereby argue *a fortiori* for the certainty of the communication of Christ's body and blood through the sign of the Supper:

Humanly devised symbols, being images of things absent rather than marks of things present (which they very often falsely represent), are still sometimes graced with the titles of those things. Similarly, with much greater reason, those things ordained by God borrow the names of those things of which they always bear a definite and not misleading signification, and have the reality joined with them.<sup>672</sup>

To address this confusion regarding Calvin's semiotic theory, it is helpful to consider his nuanced denial of the *manducatio indignorum*.

For as David C. Steinmetz explained in 1995: "By denying the *manducatio infidelium*, Calvin does not mean to deny that Christ is really offered in the eucharist to the entire gathered congregation, believers and unbelievers alike."<sup>673</sup> "In that sense" Steinmetz commented, Calvin's theology agreed with "the medieval Catholic tradition that the real presence of Christ is not dependent on human faith."<sup>674</sup> From the 1536 edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin taught that this sacred meaning of the sacrament was immutable—and always efficacious—but relative in its effects. On one hand, "we see that this sacred bread of the Lord's Supper is spiritual food, sweet and delicate to those to whom Christ has shown

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<sup>671</sup> Ward, *Cities of God*, 167.

<sup>672</sup> *CO* 2, col. 1020.

<sup>673</sup> David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 180. Even Christopher Elwood seems to overlook this in *The Body Broken: The Calvinist Doctrine of the Eucharist and the Symbolization of Power in Sixteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 71.

<sup>674</sup> Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, 180. Concerns regarding the term "real presence" are noted below.

it to be their life...On the other hand, it is turned into a deadly poison for those whose faith it does not teach, and whom it does not arouse to thanksgiving and love.”<sup>675</sup> The 1537 *Confessio Fidei de Eucharista*, which Calvin co-authored with Farel and Pierre Viret (1511–1571), also affirmed the stability of sacramental signification: “Christ offers this communion of his flesh and blood under the symbols of bread and wine in his sacred Supper, and presents it to all who properly celebrate it according to its legitimate institution.”<sup>676</sup> When Wolfgang Capito (1478–1541) and Martin Bucer (1491–1551) signed this confession, Bucer added a comment to guard against the specific misreading that Ward develops: “the error should not be borne in the church, to set naked and empty symbols of Christ in his sacred Supper, and not to believe that here also the very body and blood of the Lord I have perceived, that is, the Lord himself, true God and man.”<sup>677</sup>

This was a teaching that Calvin affirmed and reiterated. His exposition of Christ’s institution of the Supper in his *Commentary on the Harmony of the Gospels* (1555) stated: “it is not an empty or unmeaning sign which is held out to us”.<sup>678</sup> And in the *Institutes*, echoing Bucer’s addendum to the *Confessio*, “In this Sacrament we have such full witness of all these things that we must certainly consider them as if Christ here present were himself set before our eyes and touched by our hands.”<sup>679</sup> For Calvin, the integrity of this sacramental sign, and its true presentation to unbelievers, was rooted in the character of God: “We deny therefore, that the Lord withholds his hand. On the contrary, we maintain, that in order to be perpetually consistent with himself, and in infinite goodness strive with the wickedness of men, he truly offers what they reject.”<sup>680</sup> Article eighteen of the *Consensus Tigurinus* (1549) had stated, “Christ with all his gifts is offered to all in common, and that

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<sup>675</sup> CO 1, cols. 126–127.

<sup>676</sup> CO 9, col. 712.

<sup>677</sup> CO 9, col. 712.

<sup>678</sup> CO 45, col. 707.

<sup>679</sup> CO 2, col. 1003.

<sup>680</sup> CO 9, col. 26.

the unbelief of man not overthrowing the truth of God, the sacraments always retain their efficacy”.<sup>681</sup> Taylor’s gloss, “[t]he whole efficacy of the sacrament is contingent on the connection between God and my faith,” overlooked this. In his exposition of the confession, Calvin explained:

But lest any should suppose from this that anything is lost to the virtue of the sacraments, or that by the unbelief and wickedness of man the truth of God is impaired, I think we carefully put them on guard when we say, that the signs nevertheless remain entire, and offer divine grace to the unworthy, and that the effect of the promises does not fail, though unbelievers receive not what is offered.<sup>682</sup>

Calvin expounded this aspect of his semiotic theory with a metaphor derived from the differing effects of the sun’s rays. He explained that in the Supper, “everyone receives from the sign just as much benefit as his vessel of faith can contain,” but, “just as the light of the sun, while it invigorates a living and animated body, produces effluvia in a carcase; so it is certain that the sacraments where the Spirit of faith is not present, breathes mortiferous rather than vital odour.”<sup>683</sup> In this way, Calvin’s exposition of the *Consensus Tigurinus* displayed the maturation of his teaching that the Supper is “spiritual food, sweet and delicate” to believers but “deadly poison” to unbelievers from 1536. Furthermore, in his exposition of the *Consensus Tigurinus*, Calvin also addressed the Donatist teaching that sacraments administered by unworthy ministers were not efficacious:

We hold the ordinance of God to be too sacred to depend for its efficacy on man. Be it then that Judas, or any other epicurean contemner of everything sacred, is the administrator...we hold that... [the] spiritual nourishment of the body and blood of Christ, are conferred through his hand, just as if he were an angel come down from heaven.<sup>684</sup>

This striking imagery relates to the Augustinianism of Calvin’s semiotic theory, which also underlay his distinction to affirm that unbelievers truly receive the sign of the Lord’s body

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<sup>681</sup> CO 7, col. 740.

<sup>682</sup> CO 9, cols. 25–26.

<sup>683</sup> CO 9, col. 25.

<sup>684</sup> CO 9, col. 26.

and blood, but to deny that they partook of the substance of Christ which is received by faith according to the power of the Holy Spirit. This nuance was essential for Calvin's apologetic interpretation of Augustine's writing that unbelievers ate the body of Christ unto damnation, which Calvin denied from his exegesis of John 6, but considered a legitimate statement as Augustine was speaking sacramentally.<sup>685</sup> This debate surrounding the *manducatio indignorum* was critical in Reformed–Lutheran disagreement concerning the eucharist. Addressing their differing understandings of the Supper in a concluding irenic gesture towards Heshusius in 1561, Calvin wrote,

Christ offers his body and blood to all in general; but as unbelievers bar the entrance of his liberality, they do not receive what is offered. It must not, however, be inferred from this, that when they reject what is given, they either make void the grace of Christ, or detract in any respect from the efficacy of the sacrament. The Supper does not, through their ingratitude, change its nature, nor does the bread, considered as an earnest pledge given by Christ, become profane, so as not to differ at all from common bread, but it still truly testifies communion with the flesh and blood of Christ.<sup>686</sup>

This was a clear affirmation from Calvin that the sacramental bread remained sacred even in the hands of unbelievers—its sacred efficacy was categorically not contingent on their faith—and it was their contempt for that which was truly sacred that effected their greater condemnation. Despite their lack of faith, the sign was not empty.

### III

The final aspect of Calvin's theology of the Supper considered in this chapter relates to how these writers perceive of univocity and nominalism, expressed in the Supper, as a vital wellspring of Western secularism. Gregory puts it clearly:

Whether it was explicitly recognized by its protagonists or not, the denial that Jesus could be really present in the Eucharist—which is particularly clear, for example, in Zwingli's spatial dichotomizing of Jesus's divine and human natures, and the claim that “he sits at

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<sup>685</sup> CO 2, cols. 1037–1038.

<sup>686</sup> CO 9, cols. 523–524.

the right hand of the Father, has left the world, is no longer among us”—is a logical corollary of metaphysical univocity...The denial of the possibility of Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist, by contrast, ironically implies that the “spiritual” presence of God is itself being conceived in spatial or quasi-spatial term...<sup>687</sup>

Before exploring Gregory’s inference of metaphysical univocity from Reformed Protestant Christology, it is important to highlight Albert B. Clover’s observation that it is anachronistic to use the term “real presence” to describe what early Protestants denied in their theology of the Supper.<sup>688</sup> The Roman Catholic view Gregory glosses as the “real presence” of Christ in the eucharist is better understood in the more contextually appropriate terms of transubstantiation: a doctrine that Reformed Protestants developed a litany of well-known arguments against, while affirming the true presence of Christ in the Supper. One drawn from the metaphysical implications of Augustinian semiotics was communicated by Calvin in a sermon on 1 Corinthians 11: “Now if we have no bread when we receive the body of Jesus Christ, we no longer have the use of the Sacrament.”<sup>689</sup> For then the bread would no longer be a *signum* of the *res*, but the *res* with the wrong accidental properties. Burnett has written a compelling article suggesting that the Protestant denial of the doctrine of transubstantiation originated in the metaphysical realism of John Wyclif (1328–1384), and was mediated to Reformed Protestantism through the Hussites.<sup>690</sup> In any case, even though Ward claims that Calvin’s theology of the Supper “points to a nominalist metaphysics,” he critiques Calvin’s realism concerning the unchanging substance of the elements as advancing, “A politics of the rational...where appeal is being made to fixed and stable identities.”<sup>691</sup> He argues that Calvin’s reasoning follows a faulty predicate: “the

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<sup>687</sup> Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 42–43.

<sup>688</sup> Albert B. Clover III, “‘Real Presence’: An Overview and History of the Term,” *Concordia Journal* vol. 28, no. 2 (2002): 142–159.

<sup>689</sup> *CO* 49, col. 787.

<sup>690</sup> Amy Nelson Burnett, “The Hussite Background to the Sixteenth-Century Eucharistic Controversy,” in *Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice*, 200–216, eds. Zideněk V. David et al. (Prague: Filosofia, 2018).

<sup>691</sup> Ward, *Cities of God*, 166.

presupposition of being able to define the nature of a thing (bread) by the human senses”.<sup>692</sup> Indeed, Ward thinks that it is epistemologically problematic for Calvin to believe, “Things fully present themselves as themselves in definite locations and with definable dimensions.”<sup>693</sup> Ward resists this view for both Christological and ontological reasons, in broad affinity with Gregory’s concerns regarding the spatializing tendency of Reformed Protestantism, but also drawing from critical theory:

He [Calvin] is obsessed with spatial determinants throughout his account of the eucharist. The body of Christ is in heaven, He descends to us, spanning the distance through his Spirit. We are below and every object, whether divine or creaturely, has its own proper location. In the space between subject and object, observation, calculation, measurement and evaluation enter.<sup>694</sup>

This disparaging reading is grounded in Ward’s confessional-Christological stance, and his aversion to modern theories of “calculation, measurement and evaluation” which produce the “scientific world-view and the capitalist cult of worldly goods”.<sup>695</sup> This anti-capitalist thrust is a vital impulse of his critique, and his modern Christology dovetails with progressive social theory:

The body of Jesus Christ is not lost, nor does it now reside in heaven as a discrete object for veneration (as Calvin thought and certain gnostics before him) in and by the Spirit. The body of Jesus Christ, the body of God, is permeable, transcorporeal, transpositional. Within it all other bodies are situated and given their significance. We are all permeable, transcorporeal and transpositional.<sup>696</sup>

Historical theologians can perceive the influence of postmodern critical theory on Ward’s Christology and account of embodiment, which he asserts here in more of a normative-theological, rather than intellectual-historical, critique of Calvin’s metaphysics and epistemology. For Calvin, Zwingli, and the other Reformed—seeking to remain faithful to

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<sup>692</sup> Ibid.

<sup>693</sup> Ibid.

<sup>694</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid., 161–162.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid., 113.

Chalcedonian orthodoxy—the true humanity of the Son of God incarnate meant that Jesus Christ’s resurrected and finite human body continued to occupy definite space. This was far from the docetic teaching that underpinned Gnosticism, and it was certainly not indicative of some implicit commitment to metaphysical univocity: Reformed Protestant theologies of the Supper sought to cohere with the metaphysical implications of Chalcedonian Christology according to the *communicatio idiomatum*; they did not spatialize the divine essence on the same plane of “being” as creation.

Calvin’s commentary on 1 Corinthians 11 communicated this important distinction: “in order that he might be present with us, he does not change his place, but communicates to us from heaven the virtue of his flesh, as though it were present.”<sup>697</sup> This does not betray a univocal conception of the divine essence spatialised and communicated in the Supper as Gregory suggests, for Calvin believed it was the “virtue of Christ’s flesh” communicated to believers through the sacrament by the power of the Holy Spirit: the substance of the believer’s participation in Christ through the *signum* of the sacrament was the *res* of Christ’s *incarnate* divinity. Ward also perceives metaphysical univocity in the form of analogical reasoning by proportion (*a* is to *b* as *c* is to *d*) related in Calvin’s claim, “our souls are fed by the flesh and blood of Christ, just as our corporeal life is preserved and sustained by the bread and the wine.”<sup>698</sup> As he expresses it:

$$\frac{A = A1 \text{ or Christ} = \text{soul}}{B = B1 \text{ or bread} = \text{body}}$$

Christ is to the soul what bread is to the body, despite the dualism (indicated by the bar) separating Christ from external sign and the spiritual from the carnal.<sup>699</sup>

This critique is predicated on an earlier misreading of Calvin’s metonymical understanding of the sacrament, noted above. As Calvin stated: “those things ordained by God borrow the

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<sup>697</sup> *CO* 49, col. 489.

<sup>698</sup> Ward, *Cities of God*, 164.

<sup>699</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

names of those things of which they always bear a definite and not misleading signification, *and have the reality joined with them.*”<sup>700</sup> The presentation of Calvin’s theology as advancing a “dualism (indicated by the bar) separating Christ from the external sign” is therefore not an entirely fair characterization. For in Calvin’s theology, it is according to the work of the Holy Spirit that the power of Christ’s life-giving flesh is communicated substantially to the believer through the sign of the Supper which is secured by God’s loving faithfulness as the sacred nourishment of Christ’s body and blood.<sup>701</sup> To Calvin’s mind, this analogical reasoning did not separate Christ from the sign but distinguished the effects of the *signum* and metonymically conjoined *res* on the believer’s united body and soul.

To conclude, it is worth highlighting one further aspect of the tendency to read metaphysical univocity and nominalism as philosophical progenitors of Western secularism mediated through Reformed theology. Zahnd has observed in connection with Gregory’s work, that it was Heinrich Denifle’s *Luther und Luthertum* (1904) which established “an apologetic tradition in Catholic research to inscribe the emergence of Reformed theology into precisely some kind of Franciscan tradition, as opposed to truly Catholic Thomism”.<sup>702</sup> Taylor and Ward have also appropriated this apologetic tradition for their projects to formulate intellectual-historical critiques of the capitalist substructure of Western modernity. This often-overlooked political dimension of their thought is significant for their historical writing: Ward dedicated his *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice* (2004) to Taylor, and wrote explicitly of his personal “commitment to socialism.”<sup>703</sup> Taylor was a central figure in the emergence of the British New Left, a founding editor of the *New Left Review*, and a founding member of the socialist New Democratic Party; indeed he ran unsuccessfully for election to parliament in Canada as an MP four times. After withdrawing

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<sup>700</sup> *CO* 2, col. 1020. Emphasis added.

<sup>701</sup> Cf. *CO* 49, cols. 486–487.

<sup>702</sup> Zahnd, “Calvin, Calvinism, and Medieval Thought,” 39.

<sup>703</sup> Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice*, 80.

from party political activism, Taylor wrote on the challenges socialists faced in advancing their policies in Canada.<sup>704</sup> Then speaking as an academic at a socialist conference in Oxford in the late 1980s, Taylor discussed how he believed it was possible to re-narrate Western intellectual history in such a way as to undermine capitalist hegemony.<sup>705</sup> With this biographical context, Taylor's argument that Franciscan piety was the devotional progenitor of Scotus and Occam's metaphysical nominalism—and the wellspring of Western individualism—takes on a new shade of meaning.<sup>706</sup> Once this Reform Master Narrative framework is understood with sensitivity to Taylor and Ward's socialist activism, their critique of nominalism as the precursor to the ideological substructures of Western capitalism e.g., *atomistic individualism* and *instrumental reason* comes into fresh light. As historians increasingly perceive this political influence, they can more accurately assess the nature of these grand narratives.

This chapter has only been able to begin working towards clarity regarding the philosophical implications of Calvin's theology of the Supper by considering where his thought is misrepresented in some contemporary scholarship and why. The methodological principles that must be retained for further research include a commitment to the careful and detailed contextualisation of the sources that can underpin empirical-analytical claims regarding the (often divergent) intellectual and social effects of theological concepts in various geographical settings. Modern interpreters go awry when they follow hermeneutical trajectories predetermined by confessional and/or political agendas in their source analysis and narrative construction. Phenomenological expositions of the "background" to historical lived experience in the "West" are inadequate for the empirical standards of demonstration of causation and must be read cautiously. Rhetorical conjectures regarding the subliminal

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<sup>704</sup> Taylor, *The Pattern of Politics*, 50–69.

<sup>705</sup> Charles Taylor, "Marxism and Socialist Humanism," in *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left Thirty Years On*, 59–78, ed. Robin Archer (London: Verso, 1989), 73.

<sup>706</sup> ASA, 94.

influence of (potentially) implicit dimensions of theological ideas should also be engaged critically. In response to modern interpreters, this chapter has sought to relay the sacred, semiotic, and metaphysical aspects of Calvin's doctrine of the Supper accurately in his own terms, and only when they are perceived in that light can the sound analysis of the implications of his thought begin.

## Chapter Six.

### Richard Baxter and the “Disenchantment of the World”

*“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”*

—2 Corinthians 4:4.

The scholars of the bourgeoisie do not like to concern themselves with anything relating to the dangerous classes; that is one of the reasons why their observations relating to the history of customs always remain superficial; it is not very difficult to see that it is a knowledge of these classes which alone enables us to penetrate the mysteries of the moral thought of peoples.

—Sorel ~ *Reflections on Violence*.<sup>707</sup>

#### I

On 26 July 1547, Jacques Gruet was beheaded in Geneva.<sup>708</sup> He was tortured for a month before his execution. A death threat against John Calvin and other ministers had been found posted on the pulpit of St. Pierre’s Cathedral on 27 June, and Gruet was arrested the next day suspected of sedition. The note was considered an attack on the ecclesiastical and civil order of the city by the Genevan Council. Gruet was a known opponent of the church, suspected of trying to poison Pierre Viret (1511–1571) in 1535.<sup>709</sup> Upon finding the note, the Council’s investigative commission swiftly searched his house in *Place du Bourg-de-Four*. They uncovered numerous incriminating and blasphemous documents deriding Calvin, doubting Moses’s inspiration, and claiming that “all laws, both divine and human, are made for the pleasure of men.”<sup>710</sup> Under torture, Gruet confessed to writing these documents and the note posted in St. Pierre’s, “in which he used threats against both God

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<sup>707</sup> Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, ed. Jeremy Jennings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 187.

<sup>708</sup> For writing related to the Gruet affair, see: *CO*, 12:563–568; *CO*, 13:566–572.

<sup>709</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church. Volume VIII: Modern Christianity the Swiss Reformation* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), § 109.

<sup>710</sup> *Ibid.*

and his ambassadors and servants, even to the point of threatening to kill”.<sup>711</sup> After his execution, his body was to be tied to the gallows so that his fate, the Council explained, would “give an example to others”.<sup>712</sup>

Later, in November 1549, the new resident of Gruet’s house found more writings hidden in the property, which he gave to the Council.<sup>713</sup> These writings were more blasphemous than those uncovered in 1547: Gruet “denied the existence of God,” (*Dieu n’est rien*) “called the virgin Mary a whore,” and blasphemed Christ.<sup>714</sup> François Berriot analysed this evidence in 1979 and considered the possibility that the documents might have been planted to incriminate Calvin’s political opponents, the *Enfants de Genève* or “Libertines,” by reinforcing the theological narrative against them. Berriot concluded that this was implausible as it would have required the godly to write the blasphemies; implicitly critiquing Lucien Febvre (1878–1956) he asked, “if there had not been, around 1550, an ‘atheist’ able to conceive the theories present in the papers of Gruet, who would therefore have thought of using them to discredit, thanks to them, a religious or political adversary?”<sup>715</sup> Febvre’s *Le Problème de l’incroyance au XVIe siècle/The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century* (1943; trans. 1982) established the enduring historical notion that it was impossible to be a sixteenth-century atheist.<sup>716</sup> Bernard Cottret’s critical biography of Calvin (1995; trans. 2000) exhibits the longstanding pressure of this consensus, recognising that

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<sup>711</sup> CO, 12:566. Cf. Watt, *The Consistory and Social Discipline in Calvin’s Geneva*, 18–19.

<sup>712</sup> CO, 12:567.

<sup>713</sup> CO, 13:568–572.

<sup>714</sup> Wulfert de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Lyle Bierma (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 47; François Berriot, “Un Procès D’athéisme à Genève: L’affaire Gruet,” *Bulletin Historique Et Littéraire De La Société De L’Histoire Du Protestantisme Français* vol. 125 (1979): 577–592, 588.

<sup>715</sup> Berriot, “Un Procès D’athéisme à Genève,” 591–592: “s’il ne s’était pas trouvé, vers 1550, un « athéiste » capable concevoir les théories présentes dans les papiers sation de Gruet, qui donc aurait songé à les utiliser pour discréditer, grâce à elles, un adversaire religieux ou politique ?”

<sup>716</sup> Lucien Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, trans. Beatrice Gottlieb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

Gruet “could validly be considered” or “probably” was an atheist.<sup>717</sup> Cottret’s hesitation contrasts with Max Engammare’s 2019 reading of Gruet as “truly Godless” and an atheist “in the exact sense of that word”.<sup>718</sup> Engammare’s comments were provocative, and named Febvre as “unfamiliar” with this admittedly “rare” evidence.<sup>719</sup> Febvre’s thesis was reinforced by the scholarship of Paul Kristeller (1905–1999), a philosopher who had studied under Heidegger, whose article on the “Myth of Renaissance Atheism” (1968) challenged the accepted intellectual genealogy between eighteenth-century French atheism and the materialist philosophy of Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525).<sup>720</sup> Similarly, Richard Popkin’s adjacent and influential scholarship on the history of scepticism aligned with this impulse to view notions of early modern atheism as anachronistic nineteenth-century retrojections and interpreted the seventeenth-century scepticism of the *Libertinage érudit* as a form of unconventional but sincere Christian faith.<sup>721</sup> Whatever the merits of Popkin’s reading of François de La Mothe Le Vayer (1588–1672), Kristeller’s interpretation of Pomponazzi, or Febvre’s assessment of François Rabelais (d. 1553), their interpretations cannot apply to Gruet. His statement “God is nothing” cannot be interpreted as pious criticism of an authoritarian church.<sup>722</sup>

The Gruet affair does pose an interesting question for ecclesiastical historians, who have Scriptural-hermeneutical resources to hand in considering Gruet’s unbelief. For when

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<sup>717</sup> Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, trans. M. Wallace McDonald (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 190–191.

<sup>718</sup> Max Engammare, “Lay Debates about the Sacrality of the Bible in Sixteenth-Century Geneva” in *Lay Readings of the Bible in Early Modern Europe*, 86–112, eds. Erminia Ardissino and Élise Boillet (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 109.

<sup>719</sup> *Ibid.*, 108–109.

<sup>720</sup> Paul Kristeller, “The Myth of Renaissance Atheism and the French Tradition of Free Thought,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 6 no. 3 (1968): 233–243. On Kristeller’s time with Heidegger and influence on Richard Popkin, see Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), vii–viii.

<sup>721</sup> Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979).

<sup>722</sup> Cf. Dominic Erdozain, *The Soul of Doubt: The Religious Roots of Unbelief from Luther to Marx* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

the cultural historian Peter Burke wrote on Febvre for the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, he asked, “was Lucien Febvre an ecclesiastical historian? Perhaps this is another *question mal posée*. All the same, asking such a question has at least one advantage; that of leading us to ask ourselves, ‘What is ecclesiastical history?’”<sup>723</sup> This chapter seeks to illustrate the explanatory power of theologically unabashed ecclesiastical history as the study of God’s chosen people, redeemed from the power of Satan to behold the glory of God in Christ, to yield a more accurate picture of early modern religiosity than a culturally turned historicism.

For critical momentum initially built against Febvre’s thesis in three ways: (1) directly through the challenge to Febvre’s work by David Wootton; (2) indirectly by studies on the flies in Febvre’s historical ointment, showcasing discrepancies in the *mentalité*; and (3) by challenges directed at the historical theory of the *Annales* School.<sup>724</sup> By 1995, Silvia Berti recognised that few historians would assert the impossibility of premodern naturalism—although the atheistic writings of Lucretius (c.99BC–c.55BC) should have rendered this thesis an immediate nonstarter.<sup>725</sup> As Nathan Alexander’s 2021 article indicated, contemporary scholarship increasingly perceives atheism as a transhistorical and transcultural position, and provides “important correctives to assumptions about the omnipresence of religious belief”.<sup>726</sup> Yet, as an atheist, Alexander is concerned that this trend likely entails a theoretical conception of “some kind of timeless and ubiquitous quality to atheism” which means “unintentionally accepting a theocentric perspective” and rendering atheism parasitic on theism, as the Jesuit theologian Michael Buckley (1931–

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<sup>723</sup> Peter Burke, “Lucien Febvre, Ecclesiastical Historian?” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 50, no. 4 (1999): 760–766, 766.

<sup>724</sup> David Wootton, “Unbelief in Early Modern Europe,” *History Workshop* 20 (1985): 82–100; David Wootton, “Lucien Febvre and the Problem of Unbelief in the Early Modern Period,” *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 60, no. 4 (1988): 695–730; Michael Hunter and David Wootton, *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>725</sup> Silvia Berti, “At the Roots of Unbelief,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 56, no. 4 (1995): 555–575. Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. W.H.D. Rouse, revised by Martin F. Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924).

<sup>726</sup> Nathan Alexander, “Rethinking Histories of Atheism, Unbelief, and Nonreligion: An Interdisciplinary Perspective,” *Global Intellectual History*, vol. 6, no.1 (2021): 95–104, 96.

2019) contended it was.<sup>727</sup> Alexander's preference is to formulate a definition of atheism and nonreligion that includes "the possibility that some societies might have found the question [of God's existence] incoherent or simply irrelevant."<sup>728</sup> This illustrates how far the conversation has shifted since *A Secular Age* was published in 2007. Taylor's narrative was constructed to answer the question: "why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?"<sup>729</sup> The premise that it was "virtually impossible" increasingly seems historically suspect as Taylor's depiction of premodern "enchantment" exhibits resemblance with Febvre's presentation of the sixteenth-century European *mentalité*—and Taylor admitted, "I am writing something akin to a history of *mentalités*."<sup>730</sup> Similar to Taylor, the founders of the *Annales*, Marc Bloc (1886–1944) and Febvre were strongly left-leaning intellectuals whose ideology shaped their scholarship in important ways, ranging from the implicit collectivism in their notion of *mentalité*, to their pioneering close attention to the social and the environmental over the *longue durée*. Archival and theoretically, the historical representation of premodern people as unable to be non-believers has largely been revised. Taylor was somewhat chastened by this trend in 2007 and acknowledged that "ancient Epicureanism was a self-sufficing humanism."<sup>731</sup> Aware that this fact opens an important line of critique against his progressivist narrative, Taylor made a "plea":

This thesis, placing exclusive humanism only within modernity, may seem too bald and exceptionless to be true. And indeed, there are exceptions...My plea here is that one swallow doesn't make a summer. I'm talking about an age when self-sufficing humanism becomes a widely available option, which it never was in the ancient world'.<sup>732</sup>

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<sup>727</sup> Alexander, "Rethinking Histories of Atheism," 95–104; Nathan Alexander, "Histories of Atheism: Key Questions and Disputes," in *The Cambridge History of Atheism*, eds. Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse, 14–33 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 21, 26–27; Michael Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), 15.

<sup>728</sup> Alexander, "Rethinking Histories of Atheism," 97.

<sup>729</sup> ASA, 25.

<sup>730</sup> Charles Taylor, "Afterword: Apologia pro Libro suo," in *Varieties of Secularism*, 314.

<sup>731</sup> ASA, 19.

<sup>732</sup> ASA, 19.

Pleading for the acceptance of this foundational contention, Taylor's choice of idiom communicated the progressivist and collectivist philosophy of his narrative with winsome discretion. Such rhetorical strategies—idiomatic expression, slang, and ambiguity—are not a stylistic glitch, but how he sought to affect the hermeneutical formation of many readers.<sup>733</sup> Yet, colloquial expressions often exclude the disruptive voice of the outsider, and Master Narratives suppress conflicting testimonies. What of Gruet?

One of the reasons why Taylor must overlook certain metaphorical swallows is because they do not cohere with his phenomenology of the “background” and his characterization of secularization is contingent on that theory: “How did we move from a condition where, in Christendom, people lived naïvely within a theistic construal, to one in which we all shunt between two stances”.<sup>734</sup> Again the postulated “background” carried the weight of this claim (which Gregory refuted): “The difference I’ve been talking about is one of the whole background framework in which one believes or refuses to believe in God. The frameworks of yesterday and today are related as ‘naïve’ and ‘reflective’, because the latter has opened a question which had been foreclosed in the former by the unacknowledged shape of the background.”<sup>735</sup> This philosophical approach does not do justice to the diversity and complexity of people’s religious lives in any era; it homogenizes and blurs out detail.

In one sense the liberal-capitalist order made “self-sufficing humanism” a widely available option because it gave people freedom and independent access to resources but that does not necessarily lead to a widespread decline in religious belief and practice as American religiosity demonstrates. The diverse spiritual acts of conversion, apostasy, doubt, and devotion have manifested in every historical era as churches have taken root in various geographical settings from the time of Christ. Ecclesiastical history studies such occurrences

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<sup>733</sup> Milbank, “A Closer Walk on the Wild Side,” 89.

<sup>734</sup> ASA, 14.

<sup>735</sup> ASA, 13.

with interpretative categories drawn from the church's scripturally based self-understanding. The category of "enchantment" is therefore not apt for this project because it is possible to be an enchanted non-Christian. The German word "*Zauber*" means magic, and Weber's "*Entzauberung der Welt*" literally translates as the de-magicification of the world. Accordingly, Taylor lapsed into talk of the "magic of the church" in his narrative of disenchantment.<sup>736</sup> When he did differentiate secularization from disenchantment later in *A Secular Age*, rebuking those who "confound disenchantment with the decline of religion," Taylor nuanced the secularization debate carefully,

these claims turn on questions of interpretation. What is religion? ... what is the past we are comparing ourselves with? Even in ages of faith, everybody wasn't really devout. What about the reluctant parishioners who rarely attended? Are they really so different from people who declare themselves non-religious today?<sup>737</sup>

The Christian ecclesiastical historian can adopt this line of reasoning, drawing from the biblical metaphor of the wheat and the chaff; Taylor does not, and his aversion to this perspective illustrates that his philosophy of religion appreciates something beyond Christianity.<sup>738</sup> One shortcoming in the secularization debate, Taylor noted, was that "religion" can be defined so broadly to include a person's "semi-spiritual beliefs" or even "the shape of their ultimate concern" to support the argument that "religion is as present as ever."<sup>739</sup> Taylor pursued his own line of argument quite differently:

Having abandoned the attempt to define religion in a way which would be universally applicable, I would like to particularize even more what has come under pressure through modernity.... [to] zero in on the following proposition at the heart of "secularization": modernity has led to a decline of the transformation perspective.<sup>740</sup>

What is the "transformation perspective"?

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<sup>736</sup> ASA, 80.

<sup>737</sup> ASA, 427.

<sup>738</sup> ASA, 105.

<sup>739</sup> ASA, 427.

<sup>740</sup> ASA, 430–431.

The perspective of a transformation of human beings which takes them beyond or outside of whatever is normally understood as human flourishing, even in a context of reasonable mutuality (that is, where we work for each other's flourishing). In the Christian case, this means our participating in the love (agape) of God for human beings, which is by definition a love which goes beyond any possible mutuality, a self-giving not bounded by some measure of fairness.<sup>741</sup>

For Taylor, the great loss with the decline of "religion" was the fading of a spiritual outlook that could sustain an ethical commitment to socialist humanism. The source for this transformation perspective was not limited to Christian spirituality and his careful phrasing reflected openness for the "multiple spiritual sources of solidarity".<sup>742</sup> In a related metaphor, Taylor described scholarship on secularization in terms of a three-storey building: on the ground floor is a thesis most people accept, "the scope and influence of religious institutions" is now lesser; the basement refers to the locus of debate regarding the causes of secularization—urbanization, industrialisation, social fragmentation, etc.—or concerning the lack of linearity to the process given eighteenth-century revivals and Pentecostalism; while the top floor entails "the place of religion today. Where has the whole movement left us? What is the predicament, what are the vulnerabilities and strengths of religion and unbelief today? Here we are in the domain that I have designated secularity 3, and of course, it is the answers in this domain, the upper storey, that interest most people, non-scholars, but not only them."<sup>743</sup> It is worth highlighting that Taylor's "story" self-consciously intended to engage "most people, non-scholars" through his consideration of secularity 3. Ultimately, he observed that the basement and the top floor are "intimately linked" as "the explanation one gives for the declines registered by 'secularization' relate closely to one's picture of the place for religion today."<sup>744</sup> This is illustrated by Taylor's own narrative, which redid the

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<sup>741</sup> ASA, 430.

<sup>742</sup> Taylor, "Charles Taylor Responds," 810.

<sup>743</sup> ASA, 432.

<sup>744</sup> ASA, 433.

tree of Western political theory to exclude certain theological ideas that contributed to liberal-capitalist order, pined for a spiritual source for the transformation perspective, but seemed relieved at the “decline of hell”.<sup>745</sup> In this way Taylor’s metaphor presented the hermeneutical dimensions of the secularization debate:

Thus one very important focus of disagreement, even among those who are together on the ground floor, arises from their respective pictures of the upper storey, which must also set them at odds in the historically explanatory basement.<sup>746</sup>

For Taylor, developing his argument in dialogue with mainstream secularization theory, the primary interpretative consideration concerned the “motivating force to religion”.<sup>747</sup> Can religious belief be an autonomous force in a person’s life? Taylor argued positively against two negative views, which he called: (1) “the disappearance thesis,” that religious belief, “tends to disappear in the conditions of modernity,” and (2) “the epiphenomenal thesis” that religion is “functional to some distinct goals or purposes.”<sup>748</sup> The disappearance thesis correlates with the disenchantment paradigm where religion is understood as a means of control, surpassed by instrumental reason, modern science and technology, then forgotten. The epiphenomenal thesis is more complex, in that it maintains religious belief is an attendant consciousness rather than a motive force. Taylor’s interlocutors for developing this socialist humanist recovery of religion against the epiphenomenal and disappearance theses were Marx and Thompson: “the religious motive was only ever tied to the misery, suffering, and despair of the human condition (‘heart of a heartless world’—Marx; despair—E. P. Thompson); when humans come to control their world and society, the religious impulse must atrophy.”<sup>749</sup> Taylor challenged Steve Bruce for operating with such assumptions, and therefore predicting that the future attitude towards religion would be one

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<sup>745</sup> ASA, 262.

<sup>746</sup> ASA, 433.

<sup>747</sup> ASA, 433.

<sup>748</sup> ASA, 433.

<sup>749</sup> ASA, 434.

of “widespread indifference.”<sup>750</sup> On the contrary, Taylor articulated his view, “which I freely confess has been shaped by my own perspective as a believer”, and his experience of being moved by the life of Francis of Assisi: “the disappearance of independent religious aspiration seems to me so implausible.”<sup>751</sup> It seems important to reiterate the force of Taylor’s argument, which stressed the link between one’s conception of religion (what declined) and one’s historical or sociological account of secularization (how it declined): a hermeneutical judgement regarding the nature of religious testimonies in history undergirds the subsequent narrative construction of explanatory accounts of secularization. If analysts cannot agree on the “what” question, then they are unlikely to agree on the “how” question, and less still on the “what next” question. Notwithstanding this, Taylor argued that the discussion did not need to succumb to analytic gridlock:

this doesn’t mean that we have simply a stand-off here, where we make declarations to each other from out of our respective ultimate premises. Presumably, one or other view about religious aspiration can allow us to make better sense of what actually happened. Being in one or other perspective makes it easier for some or other insights to come to you; but there is still the question of how these insights pan out in the actual account of history.<sup>752</sup>

This chapter is written in agreement with Taylor’s proposal: “one or other view about religious aspiration can allow us to make better sense of what actually happened.” It also agrees with Taylor’s claim: “In our religious lives we are responding to a transcendent reality.”<sup>753</sup> However it utilizes an orthodox Christian ecclesiastical-historical perspective to represent Richard Baxter’s spiritual experience for insight into the nature of this “transcendent reality” in dialogue with Taylor’s characterization of the early modern “background” to “enchantment” and the “transformation perspective.” It therefore approaches this material through the paradigmatic proposals of *Seeing Things Their Way*:

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<sup>750</sup> ASA, 434.

<sup>751</sup> ASA, 436–437.

<sup>752</sup> ASA, 436.

<sup>753</sup> ASA, 768.

*Intellectual History and the Return of Religion* (2009)—critically noting that Taylor superimposes his categories on his historical subjects—while drawing constructively from Taylor to strive, through an intellectual-historical grasp of what Baxter thought, to understand the ontological “what” of Christian religion with a view to the implications for that religion today, which is explored more fully in the next chapter and the conclusion.<sup>754</sup>

This chapter develops these ideas through two further parts. First, it studies Richard Baxter’s experience of doubt and grace for insight into the nature of religion. Second, it surveys and analyses various hermeneutical approaches to Puritan lived experience that supply Taylor’s narrative. By examining his post-1956 debate with Thompson regarding Marxist humanism, it illustrates that Taylor’s hermeneutical approach teleologically prefigures Reformed political theology as akin to Stalinism.

## II

Richard Baxter’s experiences of doubt regarding his salvation (1635–1638) and the truthfulness of Christianity (1641) represent an important testimony to hold against Taylor’s conceptual grasp of spiritual subjectivity in Latin Christendom. Baxter recorded these two waves of doubt in the *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696). His experience was commonplace, and relatively mild; Alec Ryrie’s recent book *Unbelievers: An Emotional History of Doubt* (2019) has traced “atheism” from angry blasphemy in the Middle Ages, through Early Modern Protestant anxiety, to modern secularity, he observed: “Seventeenth-century Protestant diaries, autobiographies and correspondence are full of references to ‘risings of Atheistic thoughts’, ‘temptations that there was not a God’ or ‘this horrid temptation, to question the being of God.’”<sup>755</sup> In Baxter’s case, his initial doubts concerned his own

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<sup>754</sup> Chapman, Coffey, and Gregory, eds. *Seeing Things Their Way*.

<sup>755</sup> Alec Ryrie, *Unbelievers: An Emotional History of Doubt* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019), 116.

sincerity and lasted “many years,” from 1635 to 1638.<sup>756</sup> Recording this experience in his autobiography, Baxter enumerated the “chiefest Causes” of his anxieties under five headings.<sup>757</sup> They were (1) that he did not know the time of his conversion as it had been a gradual process, and that he “could not distinctly trace the Workings of the Spirit upon my heart in that method which Mr. Bolton, Mr. Hooker, Mr. Rogers, and other Divines describe!”<sup>758</sup> (2) Baxter doubted his sincerity “because of the hardness of my heart, or want of such lively apprehensions of Things Spiritual, which I had about things corporal”; (3) Baxter thought himself to have found “more fear than love in all my duties and restraints” prompting him to doubt that “education and fear had done all that ever was done upon my soul, and regeneration and love were yet to seek”; he also (4) worried that his “Grief and Humiliation was no greater”; and finally (5) Baxter wrestled with the fact that, “I had after my change committed some sins deliberately and knowingly”.<sup>759</sup> He addressed this fifth doubt with an excursus of thirteen numbered points; justifying the digression with a pastoral addendum, “[t]his much I thought meet to say for the sake of others who may fall into the same temptations and perplexities.”<sup>760</sup>

The awkward incongruence of Taylor’s categories with Baxter’s writing renders this empirical comparison a punishing task. As Sheehan warned: “empirical objections are not really the point. For the story of the ‘secular age’ is not a history.”<sup>761</sup> Rather, as Hunter said, it is “mythopoeic” *via* “imaginal narrative history.”<sup>762</sup> It is hard to correlate Baxter’s doubts arising from the gradual nature of his conversion and his want of “lively apprehensions of Things Spiritual, which I had about things corporal” with Taylor’s description of

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<sup>756</sup> Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae, or, Mr. Richard Baxter’s Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of His Life and Times*, ed. N. H. Keeble, John Coffey, and Tim Cooper, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), vol. 5, 147; vol. 1, 220.

<sup>757</sup> *RB*, vol.1, 220–224.

<sup>758</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 220.

<sup>759</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 220–221.

<sup>760</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 224.

<sup>761</sup> Jonathan Sheehan, “When Was Disenchantment?” in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, 225.

<sup>762</sup> Hunter, “Charles Taylor’s A Secular Age and Secularization in Early Modern Germany,” 646.

enchantment. This is not because theism was not intuitive to Baxter (it ultimately was and he never doubted God's existence as Gruet did), but because Taylor's concepts do not quite grasp the depth of Baxter's experience. "Enchantment" is an analytic category of limited utility because it tends to reduce historical texture rather than draw it out. If one were to try and apply Taylor's vocabulary, it would sound as though Baxter is bemoaning his tendency to lapse into the "disenchanted" "immanent frame" as a modern believer in a secular age might, more concerned with the things of this life than the next. Moreover, Baxter's critical self-awareness that "regeneration" might have eluded him despite his theism, which could have been mere "education and fear", indicates that even within an "enchanted" Protestant Christendom there was an awareness of saving grace as a rare gift. The elision of this detail is symptomatic of what Thomas Günter has called, Taylor's "theologically weakly developed analytic tools".<sup>763</sup>

Describing his maturing sense of assurance of salvation, Baxter listed "[t]he means by which God was pleased to give me some peace and comfort".<sup>764</sup> The three means were: (1) "The reading of many consolatory books"; (2) "[t]he observation of other mens [*sic*] condition"—Baxter was particularly encouraged to find "the holiest of all the martyrs, Mr. John Bradford" often described himself as "the hard hearted sinner; and the miserable hard hearted sinner"; and (3) Baxter recorded, "it much increased my peace when God's providence called me to the comforting of many others that had the same complaints: while I answered their doubts, I answered my own".<sup>765</sup> Though he came to a considerable degree of assurance through these means and wrote, "I have no such degree of doubtfulness as is any great trouble to my soul, or procureth any great disquieting fears," Baxter still admitted in this 1664 account, "yet cannot I say that I have such a certainty of my own sincerity in

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<sup>763</sup> Günter, "The Temptation of Religious Nostalgia," 62.

<sup>764</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 224.

<sup>765</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 224.

Grace, as excludeth all doubts and fears to the contrary.”<sup>766</sup> Again, the terms “enchanted” or “disenchanted” are not adequate descriptions of this testimony; nor is some consideration of Baxter’s implicit sense of his situation illuminating; nor is the “transformation perspective” an apt categorization of Baxter’s religion as his spiritual concerns referred to his salvation from hell, not merely his capacity to aspire to “a self-giving not bounded by some measure of fairness.”

The second round of Baxter’s doubt came in 1641, when “the Tempter strongly assaulted my faith, & would have drawn me towards Infidelity itself.”<sup>767</sup> Unlike Gruet, he was never tempted towards atheism *per se*. Baxter distinguished the nature of these doubts from those regarding his sincerity by recalling his experience in the 1630s: “Till I was ready to enter into the ministry, all my troubles had been raised, by the hardness of my heart, & the doubting of my own sincerity: But now all those began to vanish, & never much returned to this day”.<sup>768</sup> This second wave was more troubling: “I was now assaulted with more pernicious temptations; especially to question the Certain truth of the sacred scriptures; & also the life to come & the immortality of the soul.”<sup>769</sup> Such doubts also came upon him with different attendant emotions. “[T]hese temptations assaulted me not as they do the Melancholy, with horrid vexing importunity; but by pretense of sober reason, they would have drawn me to a settled doubting of Christianity.”<sup>770</sup> By going through this experience, Baxter discovered his own error and yet “the great mercy of God.”<sup>771</sup> He reflected that he had focused his energies on the “superstructures” and “applicatory parts” of religion, and had not “digested or made mine own” the “truth of the scriptures & the life to come,” which “I had either taken it for certainty upon trust, or taken up with common reasons of it, which

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<sup>766</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 225.

<sup>767</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 257.

<sup>768</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 257.

<sup>769</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 257.

<sup>770</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 257.

<sup>771</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 257.

I had never well considered.”<sup>772</sup> Hence Baxter distinguished between naïve acceptance and a reflective internalization of the faith. Along with doubts regarding the truthfulness of Scripture and the immortality of the soul, this “pretense of sober reason” “set before me such mountains of difficulty in the Incarnation, the person of Christ, his undertaking & performance, with the scripture Chronology, Histories, & Style &c’.<sup>773</sup> These were arguments that Gruet and other pre-modern non-Christian polemicists had been making for centuries. Baxter said that these doubts would have,

stalled & overwhelmed me, if God had not been my strength. And here I saw much of the mercy of God, that he let not out these terrible & dangerous temptations upon me, while I was weak & in the infancy of my faith: For then I had never {have} been able to withstand them. But faith is like a tree, whose top is small while the root is young & shallow: & therefore as then it hath but small rooting, so is it not liable to the shaking winds & tempests as the big & high grown trees are: But as the top groweth higher, so the roots at once grow greater, & deeper fixed, to cause it to endure its greater assaults.<sup>774</sup>

Baxter’s description of faith is substantive in a way that should not be blurred as “enchantment” and cannot be subsumed into a vague “transformation perspective”. It attests to his reflexivity and appreciation that Christian experience of grace is distinct, precious, and not axiomatic. For “[i]n the storm of this temptation,” Baxter wrote, “I questioned a-while whether I were indeed a Christian or an infidel”.<sup>775</sup>

Baxter listed ten arguments that aided him in his spiritual warfare against infidelity.<sup>776</sup> This paragraph highlights five. First, in continuity with Romans 1:19 “[f]or what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them,” he attested to never doubting the existence of God. For him, God’s existence was a self-evident truth. Indeed: “he seemed mad to me that questioned whether there were a God: that any

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<sup>772</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 257.

<sup>773</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 258.

<sup>774</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 258.

<sup>775</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 258.

<sup>776</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 258.

man should dream that the world was made by a Conflux of irrational Atoms, & Reason came from that which had no reason...these & all the suppositions of the Atheist have ever since then been so visibly foolish and shameful to my apprehension”.<sup>777</sup> So Baxter was aware of Lucretian atheism, found the existence of God self-evident nevertheless, and still worried if he were “a Christian or an infidel”. There is a complexity to this material that is lost in the portrayal of naïve enchantment. Baxter’s fifth enumerated source of assurance came through comparing Christianity to other religions: “I saw that there is no other religion in the world that can stand in competition with Christianity”.<sup>778</sup> It appeared to Baxter that “Heathenism & Mahometanisme are kept up by tyranny, & beastly ignorance, & blush to stand at the barre of reason” whilst “Judeisme is but Christianity in egg or seed.”<sup>779</sup> This was quite a naturalistic critique of other faiths. Relatedly, Baxter’s seventh source of assurance was found by drawing an ethical comparison between Christianity and different religions: “I perceived that all other religions leave the people in their worldly sensual & ungodly state.”<sup>780</sup> Eighth, Baxter drew comfort from the specific substance of the Christian faith, and “how wonderfully Faith is fitted to bring men to the Love of God; when it is nothing else but the beholding of his amiable attractive Love & Goodness in the face of Christ, & the promises of Heaven, as in a glass till we see his glory{ous face}.”<sup>781</sup> In this way he drew encouragement from the aesthetic beauty of God’s design that it was “Faith” and a saving delight in the love of God and the goodness of Jesus Christ that reconciled human beings to their Creator. This “transcendent reality,” which has been the joy of Christians through the ages, is not less than a “transformation perspective” but it is more, and an ecclesiastical-historical focus can accurately represent this dimension of Baxter’s religion rather than

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<sup>777</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 258–259.

<sup>778</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 259.

<sup>779</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 259–260.

<sup>780</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 260.

<sup>781</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 260.

eliding it in pursuit of a pluralist communitarianism. Ninth, Baxter recalled: “I had felt so much of the power of his word & spirit on myself...shall I question my Physician when he hath done so much of the cure, & recovered my depraved soul so much to God.”<sup>782</sup> Despite his “depraved” estrangement from God, Jesus had healed him morally. Baxter had “felt” this “power” to cleanse and renew his soul from God’s “word & spirit”. That experience was foundational to his intellectually considered, self-critical Christian faith, which was aware of other world religions and rationally dismissed them. The importance of this spiritual means of assurance was revisited in the conclusion of part one of the *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, where Baxter related some personal wisdom to posterity, and described the points on which his thought had changed over time.<sup>783</sup> “Another thing I am changed in,” he recorded, was his attitude to doubt. Reflecting on the trials of 1641, Baxter wrote, “had I been void of internal Experience, and the Adhesion of Love, and the special help of God, and had not discerned more Reason for my Religion than I did when I was younger, I had certainly Apostatized to Infidelity.”<sup>784</sup> In other words, if he had not been regenerate and known the power of God’s word and Spirit to renew his soul according to the grace of Christ, then his nominal Christian commitment wrought by “education and fear” would have evaporated. “I am now therefore much more apprehensive than heretofore, of the necessity of well grounding men in their religion, and especially of the Witness of the indwelling Spirit: For I more sensibly perceive that the Spirit is the great Witness of Christ and Christianity to the world”.<sup>785</sup> He explained that due to the “folly of fanaticks” he was for a long time inclined to “overlook the strength of this testimony of the Spirit” but “now I see that the Holy Ghost was in another manner the witness of Christ and his Agent in the world: The Spirit in the Prophets was his first witness; and the Spirit by Miracles was the second; and the Spirit by

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<sup>782</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 260.

<sup>783</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 499–527.

<sup>784</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 505–506.

<sup>785</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 506.

Renovation, Sanctification, Illumination and Consolation, assimilating the Soul to Christ and Heaven is the continued Witness to all true Believers”.<sup>786</sup> Baxter placed great emphasis on this point, citing Romans 8:9: “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”<sup>787</sup> With this understanding, that Christian faith was the Spirit’s work in a true believer’s life, “assimilating the Soul to Christ and Heaven”, Baxter concluded, “therefore ungodly persons have a great disadvantage in their resisting Temptations to unbelief, and it is no wonder if Christ be a stumbling block to the Jews, and to the Gentiles foolishness.”<sup>788</sup> He knew *a posteriori*, that when he was lambasted with doubt, only his inner experience of grace enabled him to persevere: without that spiritual consolation, he said he would have given up and lapsed into unfaithfulness. As he had written earlier,

having seen both difficulties & Evidences, though I am not so unmolested as at the first, yet is my faith I hope much stronger...But yet it is my daily groans & prayers, O that God would increase my faith, & give my soul a clearer sight of the Evidences of his truth, & of himself, & of the invisible world!<sup>789</sup>

Musing on his “background” offers little insight into this transcendent dimension of his life, while the categories of “enchantment” and the “transformation perspective” distort the nature of his experience by superimposing an inauthentic classification.

Finally, Baxter famously worked “Monday and Tuesday, from morning to almost night” visiting the families in his parish, aided by several assistants during his ministry; they aimed to meet with “upwards of eight hundred families, in a year” and Baxter ministered in Kidderminster 1647–1660.<sup>790</sup> The purpose of those visits was to “admonish them in a time of health to prepare for death.”<sup>791</sup> Given this, note Baxter’s well-informed reflection on the subject of doubt in 1664: “There is many a one that hideth his temptations to infidelity,

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<sup>786</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 506.

<sup>787</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 506.

<sup>788</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 506.

<sup>789</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 261–262.

<sup>790</sup> He also ministered briefly (1641–1642) before being displaced by the civil war, and as a chaplain.

<sup>791</sup> Baxter, *Reformed Pastor*, 43.

because he thinketh it a shame to open them, and because it may generate doubts in others”.<sup>792</sup> And Baxter thought that “the imperfection of most mens care of their Salvation, and of their diligence and resolution in a holy Life, doth come from the imperfection of their belief in Christianity and the life to come.”<sup>793</sup> So he concluded, “no petition seemeth more necessary to me, than *Lord increase our Faith: I believe, help thou my unbelief.*”<sup>794</sup> This evidence is intelligible to an ecclesiastical historian, but Baxter’s meaning is incongruent with Taylor’s story.

### III

This hermeneutical point regarding the congruence of historical meaning and historiographical representation is vital as studies of Reformed Christian faith and social modernization present different interpretations of the source of the Protestant Reformational drive. In *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus/The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905; trans 2001), Max Weber famously associated the Protestant ethic with salvation anxiety and argued that such believers laboured fretfully to generate worldly success as a marker for spiritual assurance in their lives. He also made Richard Baxter’s work and writing a focus of his study, claiming that Baxter was “one of the most successful ministers known to history” given the fruit of his efforts in Kidderminster.<sup>795</sup> On the other hand, Antonio Gramsci drew a connection from predestinarian theology to scientific socialism:

With regard to the historical rôle played by the fatalist interpretation of Marxism, one could pronounce a funeral eulogy of it, vindicating its usefulness for a certain historical period but precisely because of this urging the necessity of burying it with all honours. Its rôle could be likened to that of the theory of grace and predestination for the beginnings of the modern world, which, however, culminated in the

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<sup>792</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 506.

<sup>793</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 506.

<sup>794</sup> *RB*, vol. 1, 506. Emphasis original.

<sup>795</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2001), 103.

classical German philosophy with its conception of freedom as awareness of necessity.<sup>796</sup>

In Weberian sociology, post-Reformation Protestant anxiety birthed Capitalism and the modern world, but in Gramsci's genealogy it was a confidence born of theological certainty that drove Reformed Christians. Taylor drew from both Weber and Gramsci in his reading of the Puritan reformation of manners but his debt to Gramsci seems more important, given how he wrote almost admiringly of Calvinist success in social transformation:

Where did they get the confidence to enter this uncharted terrain? This question may sound strange to us, because we live very much in the age they have created...even beyond the point that the reforms of Calvinist divines and neo-Stoic ministeriales aimed at starting...And yet we have to conquer anachronism, and realize how important, and even astonishing the change was here. The question returns: *how did they come to believe that they could do it?*<sup>797</sup>

Taylor's socialist humanist answer was a retrojection of Soviet era Stalinism—the apocalyptic fulfilment of scientific socialism: “what all these programmes betoken, and what underlies this drive to make over, is an extraordinary confidence in the capacity to remodel human beings....a comparably great ambition is evident in the ordinances of the Polizeistaat...the belief was that nothing in principle stood in the way of this social engineering.”<sup>798</sup> The reading of certain political theologies as analogous with Communism was articulated by Taylor in his article “Clericalism” (1960) for the *Downside Review*,

The Christian conception of history as a march towards the Parousia is no longer possible once all initiative has been taken from the ‘people of God.’ The rules are simply laid down once and for all. Even if we were to conceive a theocracy with an eschatological orientation, such as, to take a political analogy, Communism, the very fact that the initiative of the ‘laity’ is suppressed in one generation tends to rigidify the ‘clergy’ in the next, for the latter must be recruited from the former. Clericalism tends, too, to reduce the emphasis on a consciousness of Christian history. For this one needs a highly developed sense of the Church as a community called to a collective vocation.<sup>799</sup>

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<sup>796</sup> *MPOW*, 75.

<sup>797</sup> *ASA*, 120–121. Also, *ASA*, 125.

<sup>798</sup> *ASA*, 121.

<sup>799</sup> Charles Taylor, “Clericalism,” *Crosscurrents*, vol. 10, no. 4 (1960): 327–336, 331.

The error behind theocracy is that of suppressing the distinction between the periods before and after the Parousia. Then there will be no divergence between the will of God and the behaviour of created things. But this cannot be the case now. By no feat of engineering, social or mechanical, can it be made the case...The necessary tension between the Church and the world has been suspended, or rather breaks out as a struggle for power between believers and non-believers, between two absolute claims.<sup>800</sup>

The focus of this historiographical study is to explore the intellectual history of Taylor's analogy, but the analogy between Puritan theocracy and Communism is shown to be misguided through consideration of the details of each political hope. For the Puritan: the political hope is transcendent in the glorification of God; the political society has a mimetic aim to correspond with God's revealed will; and the anthropology behind the vision is pessimistic. Baxter did believe, "[t]he more Theocratical, or truly Divine any Government is, the better it is."<sup>801</sup> And his political thought was orientated by the principle that it was not so much the how but the who of government that mattered. "Name us that Commonwealth on earth that is piously Ruled by impious Rulers, and Prudently Ruled by fools, whatever the Model of Government may be."<sup>802</sup> Baxter perceived that "men at liberty will rule according to their dispositions" regardless of the form of government, though good laws might be able to restrain bad rulers.<sup>803</sup> Hence Baxter articulated how God's grace infused his political vision:

Holiness is a new Nature: and therefore a constant Monitor and mover unto Good. They that Love God and Virtue, and hate all evil, will rule accordingly. It [is] true, they are imperfect, and have their faults: but that which is predominant in their hearts, will be predominant in their Government.<sup>804</sup>

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<sup>800</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>801</sup> Richard Baxter, *A Holy Commonwealth*, ed. William Lamont (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 127.

<sup>802</sup> Ibid., 143

<sup>803</sup> Ibid.

<sup>804</sup> Ibid., 144.

This transcendent dimension and subjective emphasis in Baxter's political theology renders an implicit analogy with scientific socialism unconvincing; furthermore, analogy does not demonstrate a causal relation.

The remainder of this chapter parses out Taylor's nuanced reading of the motive forces for Calvinist reform by critically delineating three interpretive strands: (1) a hermeneutic of suspicion that reads Puritan reformation as driven by fear; (2) his humanist emphasis on spontaneous freedom articulated in debate with Thompson; and (3) his intellectual genealogy that nuances Weber's reading of the rise of Capitalism by linking disenchantment and social reform with the instrumental stance.

The hermeneutic of suspicion operative in Taylor's interpretation of Baxter's political theology was appropriated from the scholarship of Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (1965).<sup>805</sup> As Taylor wrote in *Sources of the Self*, "Michael Walzer is surely right in arguing that one of the driving motives in the specifically Calvinist and especially Puritan brand of reformation was horror at disorder".<sup>806</sup> The relevant portion of *A Secular Age*, which must be given in full as the sole occasion when Taylor named Baxter, drew the quotations of Reformed theology from Walzer:

The Puritan notion of the good life, by contrast, saw the "saint" as a pillar of a new social order. As against the indolence and disorder of monks, beggars, vagabonds and idle gentlemen, he "betakes himself to some honest and seemly trade, and [does] not suffer his senses to be mortified with idleness." This means not just any activity, but one to which he has given himself as a lifetime's vocation. "He that hath no honest business about which ordinarily to be employed, no settled course to which he may betake himself, cannot please God." So the Puritan preacher, Samuel Hieron. These men are industrious, disciplined, do useful work, and above all can be relied upon. They have "settled courses", and are thus mutually predictable. You can

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<sup>805</sup> Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965); *ASA*, 787–788, notes 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 37, 67. Taylor's reliance on this work by Walzer is longstanding, the exact same quotations are cited in *SS*. Taylor overlapped with Walzer at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University, 1981–1982. *SS*, 7.

<sup>806</sup> *SS*, 94.

build a solid, dependable social order on the covenants they make with each other. They are not tempted to mischief, because it is idleness which is the principal breeding ground of all sorts of evils. “An idle man’s brain becometh quickly the shop of the devil . . . Whereof rise mutinies and mutterings in cities against magistrates? You can give no greater cause thereof, than idleness.” With such men, a safe, well-ordered society can be built. But, of course, everyone will not be like them. However, the Puritan project can cope with this difficulty: the godly were to rule; the unregenerate were to be kept in check. The magistrate, as Baxter thought, must force all men “to learn the word of God and to walk orderly and quietly . . . till they are brought to a voluntary, personal profession of Christianity.” This was, of course, basically the same as the order Calvin erected in Geneva. Thus while the Calvinist Reformation was defining the path to true Christian obedience, it also seemed to be offering the solution to the grave, even frightening social crises of the age. A very human social anxiety could enter, along with the hunger for salvation and the fear of damnation, into the reasons for espousing a faith, which would both regenerate the believer, and perhaps also put bounds to a threatening condition of disorder. Spiritual recovery and the rescue of civil order go together.<sup>807</sup>

The focus on “settled courses” is emblematic of the reading that Reformed theology generated an atomistic social theory and corresponding mechanistic vision of society. Perhaps Taylor does not give Baxter enough credit for prizing a “voluntary, personal profession” of faith in an era of confessionalization. And in Reformed theology, regeneration precedes faith—faith does not “regenerate the believer.” The suspicious reading of their faith as an instrument of social control is far from a hermeneutic of sympathy. As Taylor’s presentation indicates, Reformed theology has polarized interpreters. On one hand, George Whitfield (1714–1770) was “greatly refreshed to find what a sweet savour of good Mr. Baxter’s doctrine, works, and discipline, remained to this day” when he visited Kidderminster in 1743.<sup>808</sup> And J. I. Packer described Baxter as “a gifted theologian” and “a great Christian” whose theology sought to articulate “foundations of the catholic idea of a Christian culture that Augustine formulated in *The City of God*.”<sup>809</sup> On the other, Walzer

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<sup>807</sup> ASA, 106–107.

<sup>808</sup> RB, vol. 1, 107–108.

<sup>809</sup> J. I. Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 404, 406.

described it as “a kind of spiritual terrorism”.<sup>810</sup> Unlike Whitfield and Packer, Walzer is not a Christian and his unempathetic reading of the Puritans relied on a suspicious assessment of their motives: “Only repression, the fearful ministers believed, could lead to that significant increase in the intensity and security of social control which they had so ardently desired. The ‘reformation of manners’ was, or rather would have been, had it ever taken place on the scale which the ministers intended, the Puritan terror.”<sup>811</sup> Walzer’s critique was influenced by a Nietzschean reading of Puritan faith as an expression of *ressentiment*: “The saints were eager to extend the power of the state only for the sake of reformation, which is to say, only because they hoped one day to exercise that power themselves. And that, indeed, was to be God’s revenge on old England.”<sup>812</sup> His hermeneutic, as Taylor’s three-storey building metaphor elucidated, therefore generated an implicit causal account of secularization as well. “The saints had originally planned to extend their control throughout society.” Walzer wrote, “But perhaps as they won their inner battles—however paltry the victories—and established their new routines, the ‘visible disorder’ of the ‘unbroken poor’ became less and less a personal threat.”<sup>813</sup> In their newfound strength, Walzer implied, their fears subsided and their will to power was sated; so goes his ungracious hermeneutic of their religion as epiphenomenal. Hence Walzer extended his understanding of Puritanism forward two centuries to explain the surge of nineteenth-century evangelicalism: “Methodism and the factory, socialism and the unions would one day bring them back into the world of saints and citizens.”<sup>814</sup> Similar to Taylor, Walzer is a Communitarian Leftist who came of age in the wake of 1956 so thoughts of totalitarianism percolate his reading of “[t]he fearful Puritan demand for total, state-enforced repression”.<sup>815</sup>

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<sup>810</sup> Walzer, *Revolution*, 221.

<sup>811</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>812</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>813</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>814</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>815</sup> *Ibid.*

In *A Secular Age*, Taylor described the motives of early modern elites to discipline society as driven by economic self-preservation and political aspiration: “intervention was driven by fear, and ambition; to head off disorder, and to increase power; a negative and a positive motive. But it seems to me that this can’t be the whole story. There was also another fear, and another positive goal.”<sup>816</sup> Developing this point, Taylor modified Walzer’s hermeneutic of suspicion,

there was another kind of fear operative among élites. This is the kind we feel when, struggling with a difficult discipline ourselves, we see others flaunting untamed conduct; the kind of disturbance that overt sexual licence arouses among those who are striving to control desire in their own lives. If the straight fear of crime, disease and disorder can account for the poor laws, what explains the attempts to suppress elements of popular culture, like Carnival, feasts of ‘misrule’, various kinds of dancing and the like?<sup>817</sup>

Taylor did not appear to give a clear answer to this question. His argument digressed into an exposition of the symbiotic nature of religious and civil reform. He argued that, with the new unclarified motive, “the objective is no longer simply civility. This kind of change was often driven by the demands of religious reforms. But this brings us to one of the main points I want to make.”<sup>818</sup> The important point for Taylor was that this era ostensibly witnessed the closer coalescing of religious and social aspiration.

Although the goals of civility and religious reform (whether Protestant or Catholic) can be clearly distinguished in definition, they were frequently seamlessly combined in practice. Attempts to discipline a population, and reduce it to order, almost always had a religious component, requiring people to hear sermons, or learn catechism, for example; and how could it be otherwise in a civilisation where good conduct was inseparable from religion? At the same time, religious reforms had a public order component; and this seemed inescapable, since the fruits of religious conversion were supposed to include an ordered life, and this involved conforming to a certain social order as well.... All this was part of a single programme of reform.<sup>819</sup>

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<sup>816</sup> ASA, 103.

<sup>817</sup> ASA, 103.

<sup>818</sup> ASA, 103.

<sup>819</sup> ASA, 103–104.

His argumentative agenda was to bundle such religious and civil reforms together under the banner of “Reform”—in the sense of his Reform Master Narrative—as a single sociological phenomenon animated by a common “rage for order” that energized the Protestant Reformation akin to the Jacobin revolution. As Taylor wrote, “[t]he English Reformation provides an early example of this...At first imposed by élites, it suppressed by force the main practices of a Catholicism which was the living faith of the majority....Now this process of élite-engendered destruction and popular recreation happened again and again in the centuries which follow. To mention only the history of France, the seventeenth century Counter-Reformation...then the Revolution and the dechristianization of the Jacobin period”.<sup>820</sup> For Taylor, this was all “distant preparation for a world in which something like the Bolshevik party can emerge”.<sup>821</sup>

For insight into Taylor’s Socialist Humanist prizing of poietic freedom, it is necessary to examine his early debate with E. P. Thompson. Taylor’s intervention in that post-1956 dispute had helped to adjust the aims and moral philosophy of the New Left movement before the *New Left Review* was established.

Their debate unfolded after Thompson published “Socialism and the Intellectuals” in the first volume of the *ULR*, Spring 1957.<sup>822</sup> He lamented the failure of socialist intellectuals to help people “become aware of the vast human potentialities—economic, intellectual, spiritual—denied or frustrated by capitalist society”, and the disappointing lack of open circuits between intellectuals and the working class in Britain.<sup>823</sup> He also provocatively stated: “Although I have resigned from the Communist Party—I remain a Communist.”<sup>824</sup> The next edition of the *ULR*, Summer 1957, included four responses to

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<sup>820</sup> ASA, 441–442.

<sup>821</sup> ASA, 65.

<sup>822</sup> E. P. Thompson, “Socialism and the Intellectuals,” *Universities and Left Review*, vol. 1, no.1 (1957): 31–36.

<sup>823</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>824</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

Thompson, including one from Taylor, and then Thompson's rejoinder. In this exchange, Taylor focused on Thompson's reticence to drop the Communist label and called for a much more critical reassessment of Marxist Communism. "Thompson is perhaps too much in a hurry to reaffirm the values of Communism," Taylor wrote,

Stalinism did not just add itself to Communism, it was not an external element deflecting the mainstream of Communist development. In every real sense it has grown out of Communism.<sup>825</sup>

Then, after citing instances of Stalinist oppression, Taylor continued:

The question has to be asked: What in Communism do these and other similar events force us to call into question? Just Stalinism? or also Leninism? Perhaps something of Marx as well? I believe that these questions need to be answered in all honesty...<sup>826</sup>

Thompson was not persuaded that Stalinism was so inextricable from Marxist Communism and responded with a line of critique that has been refigured by some readers of *A Secular Age*.

While I appreciate many of Charles Taylor's points, I think his approach to the extraordinary contradictory phenomena of Communist theory, Communist-led movements, Communist Parties in and out of power in different countries, the Communist tradition, is unhistorical and a trifle academic.<sup>827</sup>

Thompson maintained that the "fundamental humanist content" of Communism was expressed in certain historical contexts, and so he posed the question to Taylor: "is it true to say that Czech Stalinism 'grew out of Communism', or is it not more true to say that Communist philosophy degenerated under these social and political pressures?"<sup>828</sup>

Their dialogue continued in the *New Reasoner*, Autumn 1957, where Taylor published, "Marxism and Humanism" to elucidate what he perceived as two of Marxist

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<sup>825</sup> Charles Taylor, "Socialism and the Intellectuals—Three," *Universities and Left Review*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1957): 18–19, 19.

<sup>826</sup> Ibid.

<sup>827</sup> E. P. Thompson, "Socialism and the Intellectuals—A Reply," *Universities and Left Review*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1957): 20–22, 22.

<sup>828</sup> Ibid.

Communism's central flaws. First: its reductive, scientific anthropology, which produced oversimplified and misguided notions of the possibilities for ideological unanimity in its social theory that in practice led to oppression.<sup>829</sup> As he explained:

The "enemies of Socialism" imagined or real, ceased to be really human. If they could not be used or moulded, they could be swept aside like obstacles, as a bulldozer removes the unevenness in the terrain....It is clear that an outlook of this kind could have no place for any spontaneous moral feelings on the part of people. These were necessarily suspect; originating outside the apparatus, they could hardly be genuine, and must therefore be ruse or pretext.<sup>830</sup>

So, Taylor asked a penetrating question:

What value has a man, even unregenerate and obstinately resisting the most elementary social justice? This question is a crucial one for humanism.<sup>831</sup>

He related this to a problem inherent in Marxist philosophy.

Marx has emphasized countless times that the proletariat cannot free itself without freeing all mankind, that it cannot break its fetters without breaking all forms of exploitation, but this does not tell us clearly enough what attitude to take to those individuals who **will** not be freed.<sup>832</sup>

Taylor's concern was that Marxist Communism was predicated on a reductive anthropology that gave no credence or legitimacy to the "spontaneous moral feelings on the part of the people": their agency was predicted and scripted by the Party's science, and if they did not behave accordingly then they were disposable. His critique of Baxter was that he found his political theology an oppressive restraint on those who were compelled to "walk quietly and learn the word of God". Taylor's argument in the 1950s reflected the focus of his doctoral research, which critiqued psychological behaviourism by stressing that the stimulus-response theory of mind was unable to account for the human capacity to form goals and pursue them autonomously and spontaneously. As noted in chapter two, Stalin's interest in

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<sup>829</sup> For a later statement of this thesis: Taylor, "Marxism and Socialist Humanism," in *Out of Apathy*, 59–78.

<sup>830</sup> Charles Taylor, "Marxism and Humanism," *New Reasoner*, no. 2 (1957): 92–98, 94.

<sup>831</sup> Taylor, "Marxism and Humanism," 96.

<sup>832</sup> *Ibid.*, 97. Emphasis original.

neo-Pavlovian reflex conditioning had also been revealed in 1956.<sup>833</sup> Taylor's dissertation can therefore be interpreted as an intervention in the philosophy of mind that attempted to recover and preserve the autonomy of the human subject—a vital element of humanism that was philosophically atrophied in Marxist Communism. He was emphatic that Marxism was at best an incomplete Humanism: “Marx said: the proletariat cannot free itself without freeing all members of society. Socialist humanism must add: the proletariat must not free itself by depriving some men of their status as human beings.”<sup>834</sup>

The second line of criticism Taylor undertook against Marx's Humanism was to stress the lack of theory connecting his vision of unalienated labour and human solidarity.

Marx believed these two developments were inseparable, and could only be accomplished together—this was because of the nature of human labour, as social labour....The very nature of the link that Marx posits between these two developments seems to incline us more towards the first than the second. For if brotherhood is a necessary concomitant of the freeing of human nature, because that nature is the product of social labour, then the temptation is to build the new human nature by social labour, even if it involves trampling underfoot for a time the brotherhood of man. Marx never posed this question...<sup>835</sup>

Gramsci's theory of counterhegemony helped Taylor and other figures in the British New Left to address this question practically. The revolutionary emancipation from capitalism might be undertaken peacefully—by reversing the order pursued by the Bolsheviks, and cultivating solidarity first, to overcome capitalism second. This was what Taylor communicated in his response to Blakely in 2021. In his 1975 book on Hegel, Taylor wrote prescriptively: “We need at once freedom and post-industrial *Sittlichkeit*.”<sup>836</sup> His poetic and expressivist socialist humanist hope communicated the need for both lived autonomy and a sense of embedding in a social fabric and moral framework that gives a healthy meaning

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<sup>833</sup> Tucker, “Stalin and the Uses of Psychology,” 455–483.

<sup>834</sup> Taylor, “Marxism and Humanism,” 97.

<sup>835</sup> *Ibid.*, 97–98.

<sup>836</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 461.

and orientation to life. Through his philosophy of religion in *A Secular Age*, Taylor developed new ideas such as the “network of agape” and reinterpreted old ideas such as the “Communion of Saints” in a utopian socialist effort to cultivate this sense of solidarity, or emancipatory socialist *Sittlichkeit* and disseminate it through a vital intellectual circuit in Western culture, namely the church. Nevertheless, in 1958, his intervention in this debate was successful, and Thompson conceded the point to Taylor that Marxist Communism was philosophically compromised. Thompson’s article “Agency and Choice: A Response to Criticism,” in *New Reasoner*, Summer 1958, stated:

I can now see more clearly that if Stalinism is a mutation of Marx’s ideas, the very fact that they are capable of undergoing such a mutation while still remaining in a direct line of relationship indicates an original weakness which goes beyond mere ambiguity—and especially at the point where the crucial distinction between determinism and agency is to be found. I therefore accept a large part of Charles Taylor’s argument, and his conclusion: “Marxist Communism is at best an incomplete humanism ... A really consequent critique of Stalinism cannot be a simple return to the original tradition, it must also involve a critique of the values of Marxist communism.”<sup>837</sup>

This concession from Thompson—on the back of Taylor’s arguments—helped to establish a shared critical posture towards Marxist Communism among the editors of both the *ULR* and the *New Reasoner*, which was an important step towards their merging in the *New Left Review*. Taylor’s points in this debate and his reading of Puritan political theology in *A Secular Age* exhibit correlation.

The idea of reading elements of modern social theory as originating in early modern Protestantism was articulated by Taylor in his essay “Growth, Legitimacy and the Modern Identity” (1981) for the journal *Praxis International*.<sup>838</sup> This journal was founded in 1981 through the realization that “[a]t the moment there is no international journal of Marxist

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<sup>837</sup> E. P. Thompson, “Agency and Choice I—A Reply to Criticism,” *New Reasoner*, no. 5 (1958): 88–106, 96.

<sup>838</sup> Charles Taylor, “Growth, Legitimacy and Modern Identity,” *Praxis International*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1981): 111–125.

humanist orientation, despite the increasing urgency for it, and despite the fact that the progressive movements in the 1960's brought to life a whole generation of young intellectuals and social scholars who re-opened basic issues of Marx's theory and the contemporary world."<sup>839</sup> The journal's editorial claimed to follow after "Gramsci, Korsch, Lukàcs, Bloch, Marcuse, Fromm and Goldman" and "will dedicate itself to furthering the type of theoretical understanding that is a necessary condition for a relevant, forceful, imaginative, emancipatory praxis."<sup>840</sup> Specifically, "[t]he critique of Stalinism, the demonstration that it is *not* socialism, requires a more detailed and systematic examination of what socialism *is* and in what sense it can and must be democratic...A philosophy of praxis will have to make its basic concepts more rigorous and determinate (the concepts of human being, of praxis, history, emancipation, equality, creativity, alienation, reification, social justice, rationality, critique, dialectic, etc.)."<sup>841</sup> Taylor's essay was published in the journal's second issue; it was reworked for publication as "Legitimation Crisis?" in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (1985). In that latter article, Taylor explained how he differentiated his theory of modernity from Weber's:

Max Weber held that the Puritan saw in worldly success a sort of sign of election. I think there is much in this, though I would like to trace the route somewhat differently from Weber. Because the Puritan felt called upon to treat the world as a disenchanted one, for the greater glory of God, the stance of rational work had a high value, since this is one of disenchantment par excellence. The prospering of one's labours was the fruit of what was at base the right spiritual stance. What more understandable than that God should reward those who are faithful to him? This sense of the link between prosperity and godliness was very common in early America. I want to suggest that the value put on efficacy in modern life according to nature is a kind of secular transposition, in some regards a continuation of this religious sense.<sup>842</sup>

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<sup>839</sup> Anonymous, "Why Praxis International?" *Praxis International*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1981): 1–5.

<sup>840</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 5.

<sup>841</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>842</sup> Charles Taylor, "Legitimation Crisis?" in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 267.

Drawn to *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* to identify an originating principle of modern economic oppression, Taylor developed a sophisticated line of critical theory that linked Weberian sociology with his phenomenology of the rise of instrumental reason. His account is empirically false, however; Taylor's claim, "the Puritan felt called upon to treat the world as a disenchanted one" makes no sense considering the last publication of Baxter's life, *The Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits* (1691), written "for the conviction of sadducees & Infidels."<sup>843</sup> Baxter's final story in that apologetic work recounted his own experience as a young man gambling. After a dramatic and improbable win, Baxter claimed, "[a]n atheist will laugh at this as fortuitous: but I perceived that it was the Devil's temptation to draw me to be a gamester: and I gave Mr. Harrison his Ten Shillings again, and never plaid more."<sup>844</sup> His purpose in relaying that story was "to tell some Ladies and others of great Note, that are ensnared in the Love of that vile Time wasting Sin of Cards and Dice (and Stage-plays,) that the Devil hath great power in ruling that which they call *Chance*".<sup>845</sup> Baxter worked against "disenchantment" by compiling ghost stories and records of other supernatural experiences.<sup>846</sup> As Euan Cameron has shown: "By the 1690s the loudest theological voices—at least in England and elsewhere in Protestant Europe—were actually encouraging the collecting of whatever stories might prove the existence of the 'invisible world' of spirits."<sup>847</sup> Puritans did not feel called upon to treat the world as disenchanted, rather they campaigned against "saducism".

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<sup>843</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits: Fully evinced by the unquestionable histories of apparitions, operations, witchcrafts, voices, &c. Proving the immortality of souls, the malice and misery of the devils, and the damned, and the blessedness of the justified. Written for the conviction of Sadduces & infidels, by Richard Baxter* (Early English books online). London: Printed for T. Parkhurst at the Bible and Three Crowns in Cheapside; and J. Salusbury at the Rising Sun near the Royal Exchange in Cornhill. 1691.

<sup>844</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>845</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>846</sup> *Ibid.*, vii, 65.

<sup>847</sup> Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion 1250–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 284.

This chapter has only illustrated with reference to one specific case the wisdom of Foot's historiographical injunction:

It is not the purpose of ecclesiastical history, or the study of any other religion, to formulate twenty-first-century social theory, still less to use anthropology to explain away confessional ecclesiastical history in such a way as to make the study of religion legitimate aspects of our own present, and thus to support current notions of gender, identity, liberal humanism, secularization or globalization.<sup>848</sup>

Taylor's account of Christian history with the categories of "enchantment" and the "transformation perspective" yields a distorted representation precisely because it is a "mythopoeic" constructive endeavour in contemporary social theory "to pursue the coexistence of diverse cultures" written from a utopian socialist rather than an ecclesiastical-historical perspective. On the contrary, an empirical and theologically forthright history gives insight into Christian experience, the nature of God's grace in Christ, and the perennial nature of unbelief.

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<sup>848</sup> Foot, "Has Ecclesiastical History Lost the Plot?" 20.

## Chapter Seven.

### Jonathan Edwards and the “Re-Enchantment” of Modernity

*And the devil who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

*Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.*

—Revelation 20:10–15.

First, I will speak of an idea that, as far as I know, has not yet occurred to anyone—we must have a new mythology, but this mythology must serve ideas, it must become a mythology of reason.

Until we make ideas aesthetic, that is, mythological, they are of no interest to the people and, conversely, until mythology is reasonable, the philosopher must be ashamed of it.

Thus, in the end, enlightened and unenlightened must shake hands, mythology must become philosophical, and the people reasonable, and philosophy must become mythological in order to make the philosophers sensuous. Then eternal unity will reign among us. No longer the scornful glance, no longer the blind trembling of the people before their sages and priests. Only then will we find the equal cultivation of all powers, those of the single person as well as of all individuals. No power will be suppressed any longer; then, universal freedom and equality of the spirits will reign!—A higher spirit sent from heaven must found this new religion among us, it will be the final, the greatest work of humanity.

—Hegel ~ *Earliest System-Programme of German Idealism*.<sup>849</sup>

The final chapter of *A Secular Age* was written with an ecclesiastical agenda. “I wanted to get something off my chest” Taylor explained, “because the issues of how Christians respond to this ‘secular age’ just got more and more pressing; in the argument of the book, but also in the life of the church. So there is a lot of advocacy in the end, intervening in an

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<sup>849</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, “The Earliest System-Programme of German Idealism,” in *The Hegel Reader*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 28–29.

internal debate in the Church. Here I am not just setting the stage, but trying to convince people, or so I must confess.”<sup>850</sup> His final chapter was a sophisticated apologetic for a liberal pluralist philosophy of religion underpinned by a romantic philosophy of language. The chapter contained seven numbered parts, and the broad flow of his argument moved with a strong current. Part one (pp.728–737) considered the nature of modern post-secular Christian faith, and described the experience of various twentieth century converts as analogous to a paradigm shift. Part two (pp.737–744) contained Taylor’s constructive engagement with Ivan Illich’s interpretation of the parable of the good Samaritan and his articulation of the moral philosophy that might support the network of agape. Part three (pp.744–751) delineated the alternative stances towards the modern world that might be adopted by Christians. Part four (pp. 752–755) developed the theological implications of Vatican II into a liberal pluralist philosophy of religion. Part five (pp.755–765) elaborated the philosophy of language that underpinned this theology. Part six (pp.765–767) identified topics of conflict for progressives and conservatives. Part seven (pp.767–772) speculated on the future of religion.

This chapter has four parts. Part one situates Taylor’s philosophy of religion in the context of his political theory. Part two explicates his sources for his notion of “higher time” and interprets that idea in the light of his revolutionary socialist vision. Part three examines the concept of “excarnation” in Taylor’s philosophy with reference to the themes of alienation and enchantment. Part four studies two of Jonathan Edwards’s sermons together with the *Religious Affections* (1746) to elucidate his theology of divine illumination and draw some of the implications of Edwards’s theology for Taylor’s philosophy of religion and critique of bad faith.

## I

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<sup>850</sup> Taylor, “Challenging Issues About the Secular Age,” 410.

In *The Pattern of Politics* (1970), Taylor published his analysis of the NDP–Liberal contests of 1960s Canada. Written shortly after his four defeats, Taylor’s book reads with a tinge of bitterness.<sup>851</sup> Where he had called for a radical socialist “politics of polarization,” Trudeau had successfully advocated a typical, liberal “politics of consensus.”<sup>852</sup> Taylor lamented that the liberal consensus approach to politics inadequately addressed Canada’s social problems because it sought to resolve them from within the flawed structures of Canadian economic and political life: systemic overhaul of the existing economic configuration and “a new constitution” were among his proposals.<sup>853</sup> His argument perceptibly followed Gramsci’s critique of liberalism:

As far as liberalism is concerned it is a case of a fraction of the ruling group which wants to modify, not the structure of the State, but only the direction of government...it is a question of a rotation of the leading parties in the government, not of the foundation and organisation of a new political society and even less of a new type of civil society.<sup>854</sup>

Taylor took this revolutionary socialist call for a new type of civil society to heart. This was made plain in his political-theoretical elaboration of the “dialogue society,” conveyed in an illustrative passage of *The Pattern of Politics*:

A dialogue society is one that would put the fact of dialogue itself in the central position occupied in earlier societies by an established religion, and in totalitarian societies by the official ideology. In what way? Well let us suppose that the centres of our major cities, instead of being unliveable canyons of polluted air, were reconstructed and made into genuine centres of our civilization, like the cities of earlier ages. Only instead of the temple or cathedral, we would borrow some of the real “spirit of Expo” and establish an environment in which, through the media of architecture, art, music, and film, the most important ideas, preoccupations, and realizations of our

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<sup>851</sup> Taylor, *The Pattern of Politics*, 5: “All this theory may seem remote from the pining of impressionable teenagers and the less obvious heart-throbs of the more mature matrons who created the climate of Trudeaumania.”

<sup>852</sup> This is Taylor’s own view: *The Pattern of Politics*, 1. For recent scholarship, see Hilliard Aronovitch “Trudeau or Taylor? The Central Question,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2005): 309–25.

<sup>853</sup> Taylor, *The Pattern of Politics*, 4, 16, 149.

<sup>854</sup> *MPOW*, 154.

civilization could be presented. These buildings, films, exhibits, and the like would be brought into being and constantly renewed and changed by different groups in our society and would thus reflect our diversity. These groups would have the possibility of communicating what they believe, want, and value to society at large in a way without any parallel today. The dialogue, which is now largely a private affair, whose public expression is almost exclusively intellectual, would be given a central place by being woven into our public environment....It would restore to our cities what those of previous ages have always had—a living core—so that the geographic centre of our living space would again correspond to meaning...the dialogue society would be a continual effort to express what we are in our diversity and why, and this through the most effective medium of all, the space in which we live and move.<sup>855</sup>

Taylor wrote this revolutionary, anti-ecclesiastical proposal for political coexistence and the restoration of a shared sense of meaning through the built social environment as he was drafting *Hegel*. In that latter text a formative link between his political vision and his hope for a “higher place” as outlined in his Kyoto Prize lecture was noticeable: “higher forms of human coexistence, which bring us closer to integrity, each are linked with a characteristic way of relating to things, i.e., a certain form of man-made environment.”<sup>856</sup> For Taylor, “everything connects” and his Communitarian commitment to the politics of polarization in pursuit of the dialogue society was multifaceted and deeply considered.

The political significance of *A Secular Age*'s phenomenology of fullness was prefigured in *The Pattern of Politics*. “There is an important dimension of politics” Taylor wrote, “that can only be understood in the light of the universal human aspiration to be in contact with some larger, fuller, more significant life.”<sup>857</sup> The delineation of historical modulations of this aspiration was essential to his narrative in *A Secular Age*: “the story I have to tell...has to explain how something other than God could become the necessary

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<sup>855</sup> Taylor, *The Pattern of Politics*, 125–127. See also, “In order to dispel the opacity of our society, we will have to redesign our urban environment almost totally, so that it will reflect what we are and why, and what we want to become.” *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>856</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 156.

<sup>857</sup> Taylor, *The Pattern of Politics*, 103.

objective pole of moral or spiritual aspiration, of ‘fullness’.”<sup>858</sup> This element of his “story” supported his pluralist theological proposals in the final chapter of *A Secular Age*: “We need to enlarge our palette of such points of contact with fullness”.<sup>859</sup> In Taylor’s philosophy, this proposal was inextricable from a sophisticated political vision. For the emphasis was latent in Gramsci’s essay “The Study of Philosophy and of Historical Materialism” which advanced a non-reductive account of the role of philosophy in lifting humanity towards a higher, socialist way of life:

The process of development [towards socialism] is bound by an intellectuals-mass dialectic; the stratum of intellectuals develops quantitatively and qualitatively, but every leap towards a new ‘fullness’ and complexity on the part of the intellectuals is tied to an analogous movement of the mass of simple people.<sup>860</sup>

To Gramsci’s mind, this developmental process of an intellectuals-mass dialectic was vital because “Marxism does not seek to sustain the ‘simple people’ in their primitive philosophy of common sense, but instead to lead them to a higher view of life.”<sup>861</sup> Gramsci theorized this developmental process by considering the work of the Church and noting how the development could be scuppered by the intellectuals growing detached from the masses, but “these ‘breaches’...were healed by strong mass movements which brought about, or were absorbed by, the formation of new religious orders around forceful personalities (Francis, Dominic).”<sup>862</sup> Gramsci’s interpretation of Francis in the context of an intellectuals-mass dialectical-developmental process towards a new fullness and higher form of life resounded in *A Secular Age*:

for most people who undergo a conversion there may never have been one of those self-authenticating experiences...but they may easily take on a new view about religion from others: saints, prophets, charismatic leaders who have radiated some sense of more direct contact.

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<sup>858</sup> *ASA*, 26.

<sup>859</sup> *ASA*, 729.

<sup>860</sup> *MPOW*, 68.

<sup>861</sup> *MPOW*, 66.

<sup>862</sup> *MPOW*, 66.

This sense that others have been closer is an essential part of the ordinary person's confidence in a shared religious language, or a way of articulating fullness. These may be named figures, identified paradigms, like Francis of Assisi, or Saint Teresa; or Jonathan Edwards, or John Wesley...<sup>863</sup>

*A Secular Age*, the “living book” sought to reinvigorate this Gramscian intellectuals-mass dialectic towards fullness with a fresh articulation of a liberal pluralist philosophy of religion, that saw subliminal potential in the life of Jonathan Edwards for energizing and mobilizing the masses towards socialism. Given Edwards's status within American intellectual history combined with the extensive engagement his work receives from theologians and laity, he is one of the select figures from Church history that retains a commanding stature in modern culture and writing about him has potential to mediate high and low culture (especially among evangelicals). Hence the reinterpretation and appropriation of Edwards was an important theme in Taylor's articulation of his philosophy of religion—it remains an essential desideratum in the Gramscian work of drawing evangelicals leftward.<sup>864</sup>

A thoroughly pragmatic political realism underpinned Gramsci's reflection on the interface of ideas and politics:

In the course of becoming popular, why and how are new conceptions of the world propagated? In this process of propagation (which is at the same time a substitution for the old, and very often a combination between old and new) is there any influence exerted...by the rational form in which the new conception is expounded and presented[?], the authority of the expounder[?],...and by the thinkers and scholars whom the expounder calls to his aid[?], and by membership of the same organisation as those who support the new conception[?]....These elements in fact vary according to the social group and the level of culture of that group. But research is especially interesting with regard to the masses who change their ideas with greater difficulty, and who never change them, in any case, by accepting the new ideas in their “pure” form, so to speak, but always only in more or less strange and weird combinations. The rational, logically coherent form, the completeness of the

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<sup>863</sup> ASA, 729.

<sup>864</sup> ASA, 729–730, 753–754.

reasoning...has its importance, but is a very long way from being decisive...So much can be said for the influence of the thinkers and scholars...We can conclude that the process of propagation of new conceptions takes place for political, that is, in the last instance, social reasons...From this we conclude that among the masses as such, philosophy can only exist as a faith.<sup>865</sup>

Taylor's project was to help propagate a fresh conception of the world that inaugurated the new out of the old and could underpin a modern pluralist socialism. Ultimately, uptake of the new conception would be fostered by the social conditions of pluralism. Taylor was *au fait* with the pragmatic understanding of ideas, "why shouldn't bad arguments have an important effect in history, as much if not more than good arguments?"<sup>866</sup> Resources for a left-wing turn to religion lay dormant in Gramsci's essay on historical materialism: "One of the major weaknesses of the immanentist philosophies" Gramsci explained, "consists precisely in their not having been able to create an ideological unity between the lower and the upper, between the "simple people" and the intellectuals."<sup>867</sup> This insight also lay behind his conclusion that among the masses "philosophy can only exist as faith." Gramsci's writings help to map the mesmerizing constellation of Taylor's ideas, wherein the concept of "fullness" shines like an ethical north star for intellectuals and the masses leading them towards an ideological unity.

As a socialist intellectual and politician, Taylor was compelled to be a populist. This was essential to his revolutionary and polarizing approach to politics. "The balance of power in our society lies with the affluent non-élite" Taylor wrote in 1970, "the comfortable working class, the white collar workers...This group is the political hinge in a society like Canada's. It can determine whether the dominant pattern is that of the politics of consensus or of the politics of polarization."<sup>868</sup> Of that voter bloc, Taylor observed, "[a] substantial

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<sup>865</sup> *MPOW*, 71.

<sup>866</sup> *ASA*, 567.

<sup>867</sup> *MPOW*, 63.

<sup>868</sup> Taylor, *The Pattern of Politics*, 66.

number vote for the New Democratic Party, and there is evidence that they do so because they perceive it as ‘their’ party—that is, the party of the working man or the common man against the parties of the élite. This means that their image of politics is a polarized one, an image of ‘us’ and ‘them.’”<sup>869</sup> This was a shockingly wilful and strategic stirring of resentment, advocating the political construction of a binary in/out group divide, from an author who is in principle opposed to such distinctions even notionally in theological discourse. Taylor’s theological complaint is not exegetically warranted, and evidently not based on moral principle, so therefore appears politically instrumental.<sup>870</sup>

Taylor’s populist political impulses have been discerned by some of his interlocutors. When Hartmut Rosa and Arto Laitinen discussed *The Pattern of Politics* with Taylor in a 2002 interview, they said they were “surprised when reading it because it was pretty much arguing along class lines.”<sup>871</sup> Taylor replied: “It is not precisely class, but I still think that there is a very important division in our societies between the better-off and the worse-off, in other words there is a series of issues that really appeal to people whose interests normally get neglected.”<sup>872</sup> So although Taylor’s political outlook was characterized, perhaps too generously, as “holistic liberalism” in 2018, his sensitivity to the critical electoral potential of economically marginal and overlooked voters was underlined by José Casanova in his 2020 conversation with Taylor at Georgetown University, “You have been a social democrat since before Bernie Sanders was a social democrat,”<sup>873</sup> Casanova quipped. That amusing comment brought their discussion onto the topic of political populism, and Taylor distinguished between Left and Right-wing populism. He

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<sup>869</sup> Ibid.

<sup>870</sup> ASA, 769.

<sup>871</sup> Hartmut Rosa, Arto Laitinen, and Charles Taylor, “On Identity, Alienation and the Consequences of September 11th: An Interview with Charles Taylor,” *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, no. 71 (2002): 165–195, 179.

<sup>872</sup> Ibid.

<sup>873</sup> Craig Browne and Andrew Lynch, *Taylor and Politics: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 1; Casanova and Taylor, “Global Religious and Secular Dynamics.”

noted that democracy faced a crisis “of what we call, not really very aptly, populism.”<sup>874</sup> According to Taylor, this political crisis—inaptly termed “populism”—was the mobilization of “ordinary people” around “extremely narrow notions of identity.”<sup>875</sup> He argued that the political soil was fertile for this kind of populism in parts of the United States following the social and economic alienation engendered by neo-liberalism. Yet, in contemporary Poland, Conservative Catholic populism was not driven by a sense of economic deprivation, but by a resurgence of national identity following liberation from Communist oppression. So, unlike socialist populism, Right-wing populism is not always animated by economic concerns.<sup>876</sup> It seems that Taylor was hesitant to call these Polish and American movements populist because socialism must see itself as the true populism, working towards the emancipation of the *populi* from the great structural oppression of capitalism. Taylor has noted that the contemporary left risks betraying the working class through its tacitly elitist fixation on a new progressive vocabulary.<sup>877</sup> But it is made clear from Taylor’s comments below that economic prosperity means that the political left struggle to stimulate widespread resentment against the system via economic arguments. In this connection Taylor drew from Karl Marx to explain the limitations of his campaigns in the 1960s: “We have seen many examples of the trade unionist voting NDP while his wife votes Liberal. In Marxist terms, the situation allows of two different types of ‘consciousness.’ If one consciousness is more authentically in line with the real situation and an enhancement of the potential well-being of the worker, this does not make the other any the less impelling.”<sup>878</sup> Taylor’s rationalization of his failure to gain election by recourse to Marx’s theory of false consciousness illustrates the extent to which he was invested in an economically driven

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<sup>874</sup> Casanova and Taylor, “Global Religious and Secular Dynamics.”

<sup>875</sup> Ibid.

<sup>876</sup> Ibid.

<sup>877</sup> Calhoun, Gaonkar, and Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, 151, 313.

<sup>878</sup> Taylor, *The Pattern of Politics*, 66–67.

populist politics of polarization. His dialogue with Casanova indicated that he has not lost sight of the economic objective.

When Rosa and Laitinen asked Taylor why the theme of inequality—so prominent in his early work—has “largely disappeared” from his writing, he replied: “we have to think of a new way of tackling it... There are different kinds of inequalities in the world... partly due to the phenomenal [economic] growth. Particularly in a larger number of Western societies it is not the case that the bottom has fallen, rather it has risen, but the top has risen much more quickly.”<sup>879</sup> In the material comfort of Western modernity, a socialist politics of popular economic resentment has a diminished negative pole as the “affluent non-élite” enjoy increased prosperity and are more likely to succumb to “false consciousness”. “[B]ut I think that we cannot make a frontal assault on that.”<sup>880</sup> Taylor’s calculation on this point was pragmatic, and does not constitute an indication of ideological compromise.

Some interviewers have been sensitive to the subtlety of Taylor’s work, and the latent political implications of *A Secular Age*. For example, as Thomas Meaney and Yascha Mounk put it to Taylor in 2010, “one way of formulating the political upshot of *A Secular Age* is to say that by learning to appreciate again the values we have lost, we may actually be able to incorporate some of them into the present world. Do you have an example of how that might be possible, and of how politics might help us do that?”<sup>881</sup> In response, Taylor said: “The book may have political consequences, but it’s not something that you could necessarily produce by political action.”<sup>882</sup> He gave a passing example of how his genealogical account of instrumental rationality might be invoked by “militants in the

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<sup>879</sup> Rosa, Laitinen, and Taylor, “On Identity, Alienation and the Consequences of September 11th,” 173.

<sup>880</sup> Ibid.

<sup>881</sup> Thomas Meaney, Yascha Mounk, and Charles Taylor, “Spiritual Gains,” *The Utopian*, 20 September 2010, accessed 7 May 2021, <https://www.the-utopian.org/post/2134189139/spiritual-gains>.

<sup>882</sup> Ibid.

ecological movement,” but withheld further comment.<sup>883</sup> Despite Taylor’s hesitation and reluctance, Meaney and Mounk probed the political significance of *A Secular Age* further: “So let’s talk about these political consequences. If you jettison something like the mechanistic worldview, and perhaps substitute it with a more holistic religion that makes more claims of authority during our time on earth—wouldn’t one of the consequences be that it would be very difficult for many such religions to co-exist? Is the liberal part of your soul worried about the societal clashes that might result?”<sup>884</sup> In defence, Taylor alluded to the pluralist theological agenda implied in *A Secular Age*: “That sort of thing is possible, but it’s not inevitable. Religions can be lived in very many different ways. One of the big things that started happening in the 20th century is ecumenicism.”<sup>885</sup> Reflecting on his own Catholic tradition, he said, “you can see it in Vatican II.”<sup>886</sup> Yet, he continued, “[t]here are still a number of holdouts. The current pope [Benedict XVI] clearly doesn’t know what he thinks about ecumenicism. So one of the downsides is that we have tremendous fights about this within each confession, perhaps. Nevertheless, it opens up the possibility of the co-existence of people who are not lukewarm about their faith, yet don’t see a reason to rush out and start fighting with others.”<sup>887</sup> This was a modest presentation of the Ratzinger Prize winner’s thought. In conversation with Michiel Meijer on 21 May 2019, Taylor explained: “When I was much younger and starting, the point was back then ‘let’s stop fighting each other, there is something to respect here; above all, let’s get together and be friends’. I think the ecumenism which emerges from what I am trying to articulate as an outlook is stronger than that”.<sup>888</sup> For Taylor claimed, “we can’t in the end clearly say which [religion] is best.”<sup>889</sup>

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<sup>883</sup> Ibid. For an example of this application, see Glen Lehman, *Charles Taylor’s Ecological Conversations: Politics, Commonalities and the Natural Environment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 87–89.

<sup>884</sup> Meaney, Mounk, and Taylor, “Spiritual Gains.”

<sup>885</sup> Ibid.

<sup>886</sup> Ibid.

<sup>887</sup> Ibid.

<sup>888</sup> Michiel Meijer and Charles Taylor, “Fellow Travellers on Different Paths: A Conversation with Charles Taylor,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, vol. 46, no. 8 (2020): 985–1002, 991.

<sup>889</sup> Ibid.

And in a dialogue with Richard Kearney published in 2015, Taylor presented this outlook with universalist romance, “we are part of one hermeneutical family, accepting that we know nothing for certain about the transcendent.”<sup>890</sup> Finally, when Rosa and Laitinen challenged Taylor on the ramifications of his communitarian affirmation of “particularistic traditions, religions, and strong evaluations, which cannot be checked by, or subjected to, deontological moral judgements” and how that might legitimize religiously inspired conflict, he answered: “These conflicts are very likely consequences of very strong commitments that people have to their traditions, unless those traditions are reinterpreted in order to make it possible to live with other people”.<sup>891</sup> In continuity with Gramsci’s reflections on philosophy and religion, Taylor’s socialist humanist aim was to reinterpret religious traditions so that they might coalesce in a galvanizing progressive social force.

Taylor’s theologically liberal approach to political co-existence was elaborated in *The Pattern of Politics*, through his discussion of the dialogue society. “[T]here are not just two choices” he wrote, “either totalitarian conformity around an established ideology, or a completely privatized society. There is a third choice....It could be called a ‘dialogue society.’”<sup>892</sup> “This society” Taylor explained, “would start from the fact of pluralism, from the fact that we are of many different faiths, beliefs, and moralities; but it would also start from the fact that we are all less satisfied and dogmatic in our possession of the truth; that we are all therefore in some way searchers”.<sup>893</sup> This chapter responds that the so-called “dialogue society” still entails totalitarian conformity around the established ideology of metaphysical pluralism. For the sociological “fact of pluralism” does not compel one to hold

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<sup>890</sup> Richard Kearney and Charles Taylor, “Transcendent Humanism in a Secular Age: Dialogue with Charles Taylor,” in *Reimagining the Sacred: Richard Kearney debates God with James Wood, Catherine Keller, Charles Taylor, Julia Kristeva, Gianni Vattimo, John Caputo, David Tracy, Jens Zimmermann, and Merold Westphal*, 76–92, eds. Richard Kearney and Jens Zimmermann, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 80.

<sup>891</sup> Rosa, Laitinen, and Taylor, “On Identity, Alienation and the Consequences of September 11th,” 169.

<sup>892</sup> Taylor, *The Pattern of Politics*, 124. See also, Taylor, *Reconstructing Democracy*, 1, 55.

<sup>893</sup> Taylor, *The Pattern of Politics*, 124.

a liberal pluralist philosophy of religion; to assume the role of philosopher king and theorise a society on “the fact that we are all less satisfied and dogmatic in our possession of the truth...we are all therefore in some way searchers” is to undertake a revolutionary socialist project that excludes religious convictions that are legally accommodated and protected within contemporary politics.

In this regard, Taylor’s project was subversive. His projection of fragile faith in a pluralist society evoking ecumenism in pursuit of an immanent political objective was at the heart of his phenomenology of “Secularity 3”.<sup>894</sup> His phenomenology undercut claims to spiritual assurance or theological certainty:

But I am never, or only rarely, really sure, free of all doubt, untroubled by some objection—by some experience which won’t fit, some lives which exhibit fullness on another basis, some alternative mode of fullness which sometimes draws me, etc. This is typical of the modern condition, and an analogous story could be told by many an unbeliever....We cannot help looking over our shoulder from time to time, looking sideways, living our faith also in a condition of doubt and uncertainty.<sup>895</sup>

On the one hand, this experience is self-evidently not unique to modernity and on the other Taylor’s invocation of “we” rhetorically excludes those whose lived experience do not accord with his phenomenology. There are still Christians whose experience accords with Jonathan Edwards’s attestation in the *Religious Affections* (1746): “All those who are truly gracious persons have a solid, full, thorough and effectual conviction of the truth of the great things of the gospel.”<sup>896</sup> Taylor’s phenomenological exclusion of this spirituality is concerning. Jürgen Habermas and others have challenged the worrying illiberal tendency of his Communitarianism following “The Politics of Recognition” (1990)—his inaugural lecture for the University Center for Human Values at Princeton University.<sup>897</sup> In that well-

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<sup>894</sup> ASA, 11.

<sup>895</sup> ASA, 10–11.

<sup>896</sup> WJE, vol. 2, 291.

<sup>897</sup> Amy Gutman, ed. *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 5; Robert C. Sibley, *Northern Spirits: John Watson, George Grant, and Charles Taylor—*

known essay, Taylor presented individual obligations to community through discussion of Hegel's master–slave dialectic to assert the inextricably intersubjective nature of personal identity.<sup>898</sup> Recognizing the “ironclad” and totalizing nature of these arguments, Jonathan Marks argued that “Taylor inadvertently offers a theoretical attack on individualism and a foundation for social tyranny more powerful than any to be found in Rousseau's thought.”<sup>899</sup> Given this history of concern associated with Taylor's project, the following rhetorically forceful moment of his phenomenology of “Secularity 3,” which subverted Christian soteriology and excluded orthodox believers, should cause readers to pause:

I may find it inconceivable that I would abandon my faith, but there are others, including possibly some very close to me, whose way of living I cannot in all honesty just dismiss as depraved, or blind, or unworthy, who have no faith...<sup>900</sup>

This is not universally true. There are modern Christians who pray in anguish for the salvation of family members whom they believe are going to hell. “The Politics of Recognition” argued: “Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being.”<sup>901</sup> By his own Communitarian standard, Taylor's phenomenology of “Secularity 3” inflicted this ostensible harm of nonrecognition against orthodox Christians and is “guilty of the charge of imposing a false homogeneity.”<sup>902</sup> It is not plausible to suggest that Taylor unfortunately universalized his experience in ignorance.<sup>903</sup> Especially given his comment, “[m]any

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*Appropriations of Hegelian Political Thought* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 239–253.

<sup>898</sup> Cf. Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1987).

<sup>899</sup> Jonathan Marks, “Misreading One's Sources: Charles Taylor's Rousseau,” *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 49, no. 1 (2005): 119–134, 120. Judith Butler, “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 72 (1986): 35–49.

<sup>900</sup> ASA, 3.

<sup>901</sup> Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” 25.

<sup>902</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>903</sup> Cf. Peter L. Berger, “The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview,” in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, 1–18, ed. Peter L. Berger (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 10–11; Taylor, “Afterword,” in *Working with A Secular Age*, 370

believers (the fanatics, but also more than these) rest in the certainty that they have got God right (as against all those heretics and pagans in the outer darkness). They are clutching on to an idol”—Taylor was perfectly willing to act as a liberal Catholic inquisitor and condemn these idolators himself. A more plausible line of interpretation appears upon reading Gramsci:

The Modern Prince must and cannot but be the preacher and organiser of intellectual and moral reform, which means creating the basis for a later development of the national popular collective will towards the realisation of a higher and total form of modern civilisation.<sup>904</sup>

In continuity with the argument of chapter five, Taylor’s phenomenology of “Secularity 3” traces the ostensibly intuitive grasp of the world that “*takes us*” into a new background of fragilization “even for the staunchest believer”.<sup>905</sup> In practice, Taylor’s phenomenology works to create the imaginative basis for a popular collective will towards metaphysical pluralism undergirding a new political society; it yields (i.e., strives to generate) a false homogeneity, however. The force of Taylor’s rhetoric was augmented by its moral dimension, as his phenomenology was offered “in all honesty”. The moral self-assurance of his metaphysical pluralism was expressed in “The Politics of Recognition” with credit to Johann Herder (1744–1803):

How can this presumption be grounded? One ground that has been proposed is a religious one. Herder, for instance, had a view of divine providence, according to which all this variety of culture was not a mere accident but was meant to bring about a greater harmony. I can’t rule out such a view. But merely on the human level, one could argue that it is reasonable to suppose that cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings, of diverse characters and temperaments, over a long period of time—that have, in other words, articulated their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable—are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we have to abhor and reject. Perhaps one could put it another way: it would take a supreme arrogance to discount this

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<sup>904</sup> *MPOW*, 139.

<sup>905</sup> *ASA*, 3.

possibility *a priori*. There is perhaps after all a moral issue here. We only need a sense of our own limited part in the whole human story to accept the presumption. It is only arrogance, or some analogous moral failing, that can deprive us of this.<sup>906</sup>

This is akin to religious fundamentalism: if anyone does not accept Taylor's philosophy of religion, it is "only arrogance or some analogous moral failing" that prevents them. This is not in itself a mark against Taylor; ultimately, moral realists of all persuasions are drawn to such conclusions in defending the integrity of their thought. But it is inequitable that he should then be so harsh in his criticism of orthodox Christians whose arguments are formally the same. Yet politically, it seems necessary that Taylor marginalize orthodox Christians if people are to disestablish their churches and progress towards the dialogue society. When Taylor admitted, "I'm a hopeless German Romantic of the 1790s", he explained that it was because, "I resonate with Herder's idea of humanity as the orchestra, in which all the differences between human beings could ultimately sound together in harmony."<sup>907</sup> In this, German Romanticism represented an alternative hope to traditional Christian eschatology. But in continuity with his Gramscian *modus operandi* of internal reinterpretation, Taylor called his Romantic longing an aspiration for the "communion of saints".<sup>908</sup> He also explained in his "Apologia pro Libro suo" that cultivating this communion of harmonious multicultural co-existence was the "practical extension" of the "intellectual agenda of the book".<sup>909</sup>

## II

### TRANSCENDENCE AND SOCIAL ACTION

"Modernity is secular not in the frequent rather loose sense of the word, where it designates the absence of religion," Taylor wrote in *Modern Social Imaginaries*, "but rather in the fact

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<sup>906</sup> Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 72–73.

<sup>907</sup> Taylor, "Afterword," in *Varieties of Secularism*, 320.

<sup>908</sup> Ibid.

<sup>909</sup> Ibid.

that religion occupies a different place, compatible with the sense that all social action takes place in profane time.”<sup>910</sup> Throughout *A Secular Age*, Taylor returned to the theme of time: the secularization of time, the loss of “higher time”.<sup>911</sup> Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) supplied him with the conceptualization of “homogenous, empty time” as definitive of modernity, and when Taylor introduced it he elided Benjamin’s first name.<sup>912</sup> He also cited the analysis of Perry Anderson’s brother, Benedict Anderson (1936–2015), from *Imagined Communities* (1983), where Anderson described Benjamin’s view of “Messianic time, a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present.”<sup>913</sup> Taylor’s initial citation of Benjamin led into his discussion of kairoitic time when “the timeline encounters kairoitic knots, moments whose nature and placing calls for reversal, followed by others demanding rededication, and others still which approach Parousia: Shrove Tuesday, Lent, Easter...Revolutions themselves are understood by their heirs and supporters as such moments.”<sup>914</sup> It is clear that Benjamin’s conception of Messianic time underpins Taylor’s notion of higher time and its latent revolutionary dimensions. It is also clear that Taylor believes the affective transcendence of higher time can be encountered through archetypal images.<sup>915</sup> Furthermore, Benjamin’s influence seems to extend through the form of *A Secular Age*. For as he wrote in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940):

Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history.... A historian who takes this [a concern to make history] as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the “time of the now” which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.

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<sup>910</sup> Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 194.

<sup>911</sup> See the 21 references to discussion of “higher times” listed in the index: ASA, 861, and the discussion on pages 54–59.

<sup>912</sup> ASA, 54.

<sup>913</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016), 24.

<sup>914</sup> ASA, 54.

<sup>915</sup> ASA, 144.

*A Secular Age* forms these constellations through “a set of interlocking essays” shot through with chips of higher time e.g., Taylor’s own confessional moments and other accounts of modern transcendence.

The theme of higher time is integral to Taylor’s profession of faith in Jesus Christ. In a 2007 discussion with the Iranian journalist, Akbar Ganji, Taylor said: “I am an orthodox Catholic Christian.”<sup>916</sup> Ganji, a committed secularist and outspoken critic of Iran’s theocratic regime, pressed Taylor on his faith, asking him to what extent he believed in the miraculous. “So,” Ganji asked him, “you do not contend that all contents of religious texts have objective, literal truth?”<sup>917</sup> Taylor’s answer sought to emphasize the presence and importance of symbolic truth in the religious texts of major faith traditions—truths that are arguably more profound than objective, literal facts about the world. “Not if you oppose literal truth to the truth you can carry in images.”<sup>918</sup> Taylor explained. “If you oppose that then, of course, they don’t all have literal truth. They have another kind of truth.”<sup>919</sup> Ganji was unsatisfied with Taylor’s definition of truth and pressed him further to see how it applied to a fundamental Christian doctrine: “So, for instance, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that Jesus arose from the dead, didn’t actually happen?”<sup>920</sup> Taylor responded: “Yes. I mean I think He did but by that I mean something very different: He is living fully in another kind of time.”<sup>921</sup> A rare glimpse of insight into the meaning of this statement is available in *A Secular Age*, where Taylor explained that one of the losses inherent in the turn to realist painting was that it presented “a solid world, no longer broken through by figures who dwell in a higher time, which can’t be related coherently to ours.”<sup>922</sup> There are many aspects of

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<sup>916</sup> Charles Taylor and Akbar Ganji, “Akbar Ganji in Conversation with Charles Taylor,” *The Immanent Frame* (23 December 2008).

<sup>917</sup> Ibid.

<sup>918</sup> Ibid.

<sup>919</sup> Ibid.

<sup>920</sup> Ibid.

<sup>921</sup> Ibid.

<sup>922</sup> ASA, 145.

Taylor's confession of faith that further research might explore, but two seem particularly striking. First, his attitude to theological language was characterized by a willingness to say one thing and mean another; his implicit denial of the literal bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ in favour of "archetypal figures, lodged in higher time" undermines his profession of orthodoxy.<sup>923</sup> The ramifications of this polysemic approach to Scripture and ecclesiastical tradition are compounded by his stated aim to reinterpret religious traditions for political purposes. Thus, when Taylor argued towards the end of *A Secular Age*, that "[w]hat this fragmentary and difficult conversation points towards is the Communion of Saints. I'm understanding this...as a communion of whole lives, whole itineraries towards God."<sup>924</sup> He is simply not advocating a Christian understanding of this credal statement but reconfiguring it with a view to a later explicitly pluralist deployment. Second, it seems that Taylor was trying to sublimate the interface of cosmic vitalism and revolutionary socialism represented in Benjamin's thought in his liberal Catholicism.<sup>925</sup> Drawing out the detail of that idea is another project, but Taylor's pluralist reworking of the communion of saints as a transcendently energized vehicle for socialism is evidently his vision. When Taylor considered possibilities for future religiosity, he pointed to the suggestions of Mikhaïl Epstein (b. 1950), who drew from the Russian Christian socialist Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948): "Knowledge, morality, art, government and the economy should become religious, but freely and from inside, not by compulsion from outside."<sup>926</sup> When Taylor quoted this, he wrote of "Berdyaev"—omitting his first name. An intertextual element of this allusive

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<sup>923</sup> ASA, 144.

<sup>924</sup> ASA, 754.

<sup>925</sup> Irving Wohlfarth, "Walter Benjamin and the Idea of a Technological Eros. A Tentative Reading of *Zum Planetarium*," in *Perception and Experience in Modernity: International Walter Benjamin Congress 1997*, 65–109, eds. Helga Geyer-Ryan, Paul Koopman, and Klaas Yntema (Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 2002), 76–77.

<sup>926</sup> ASA, 535. Mikhaïl Epstein, "Post-Atheism: From Apophatic Theology to 'Minimal Religion'," in *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives in Post-Soviet Culture*, eds. Mikhaïl Epstein, Alexander Genis, and Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), 448. See also, Ian Fraser, "Charles Taylor, Mikhail Epstein and 'minimal Religion'," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* vol. 77, no. 2 (2015): 159–78.

reference was Berdyaev's book *The Origin of Russian Communism* (1937). "Marxism is not only a doctrine of historical and economic materialism, concerned with the complete dependence of man on economics," Berdyaev argued, "it is also a doctrine of deliverance, of the messianic vocation of the proletariat, of the future perfect society".<sup>927</sup> He also wrote of Marxism's "messianic myth-making religious side, which gave scope to the stimulation of the revolutionary will".<sup>928</sup> He concluded that "Christianity seems to me to be compatible only with a system which I would call a system of pluralist socialism, which unites the principle of personality as the supreme value, with the principle of a brotherly community of men."<sup>929</sup> Through citation and allusion Taylor developed this intertextual relationship with a Russian version of the religious socialism and Catholic Personalism that he had learned in 1940s Canada from Emmanuel Mounier and Charles Péguy.

In *A Secular Age*, Taylor lauded Péguy as "a paradigm example" of modern faith, recognising that his spiritual "itinerary" arose through "modern protest at a crucially modern development."<sup>930</sup> "This modern development", Taylor explained, "is what we have been calling 'excarnation', in particular the exaltation of disengaged reason as the royal road to knowledge, even in human affairs."<sup>931</sup> Taylor's critique of "disengaged reason" challenged capitalist ideology by implication. He illustrated how Péguy's thought overcame excarnation through an exposition of his philosophy of history and time, as it was influenced by Henri Bergson (1859–1941) and related to his eschatology and socialism. An important feature of Taylor and Péguy's kindred vision was their notion of eternity. After distilling Péguy's thought, Taylor made an almost polemical assertion:

All this pointed towards a Christian idea of eternity. Not the Platonic, or Plotinian notion, of an eternity beyond time, but the

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<sup>927</sup> Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Origin of Russian Communism*, trans R. M. French (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), 98.

<sup>928</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>929</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>930</sup> *ASA*, 745.

<sup>931</sup> *ASA*, 746.

prospect of a redeemed or gathered time, in which all moments are reconnected in the same movement.<sup>932</sup>

Recall Anderson's gloss of Walter Benjamin's theory of "Messianic time, a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present."<sup>933</sup> In a deliberate rhetorical strategy, Taylor called the mainstream, orthodox metaphysical conception of time historically taught by the Church, "the Platonic, or Plotinian notion". Instead, he and Péguy share the "Christian" idea of "gathered time", which following Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*, Taylor developed phenomenologically through Augustine's *Confessions*. The radical claim Taylor advanced through his exposition of Péguy, was that it is possible for embodied and temporally embedded human subjectivity to experience God's eternal present through participation in the divine life in a moment of transcendent affect. By contrast, the classical philosophy of time that Taylor and Péguy reject is affiliated with a "mechanistic outlook" that considers "time as analogous to space" is "objectifying" and "fails to understand the present".<sup>934</sup> Bergson is evoked here for the contrasting view that, "[t]he present has a depth that is exactly the freedom of the world"—experiencing a moment of this freedom, participating in the divine life of God's eternal present, means affinity with the *élan vital*. The politically attuned conception of eternity and redemption that Taylor appreciates in Péguy's thought—where "all moments are reconnected in the same *movement*"—is a disruptive instance of transcendent connection with this life of history. This corresponds to Péguy's socially progressive notion of "*fidélité*, a faithfulness to the tradition which precisely excluded just going back."<sup>935</sup> For unlike his contemporaries on the Right, who sought to "go back to the institutions of the ancien regime", or the Left, who were enthralled to "(objectifying) science and progress, which relegated the past to oblivion"; Péguy believed in social progress

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<sup>932</sup> ASA, 750.

<sup>933</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 24.

<sup>934</sup> ASA, 746

<sup>935</sup> ASA, 747. Cf. *MPOW*, 68.

through embodied connection with the life of the French Catholic tradition.<sup>936</sup> In this way, “he could see”, Taylor explained, “socialism, as the re-expression of the French popular tradition, in profound continuity with it.”<sup>937</sup> His soteriological reconfiguration was, according to Taylor, “profoundly Catholic”, a “notion of how we acceded to that eternity, through a communion, with God, but through the church.”<sup>938</sup> Ontologically, Taylor gave a rather immanent gloss to this transcendent vision: eternity does not exist outside of time but is a lived moment of the present “acceded to” in embodied community—even if Péguy’s *metaphor* for this described “a chain that rises up to Jesus, a chain of fingers that can’t be disconnected.”<sup>939</sup> Taylor suggested how this vision of temporally embedded, universal, carnal Communion addressed the modern problem of “excarnation”:

The point here is to underline the carnal, the notion that the spiritual is always incarnate, and that in chains which cut across time. It reflects how for Péguy, his Christian faith is animated by his profound rejection of modern excarnation. That is, as it were, the path by which he rejoins the faith of the Incarnation. And the crucial concept here is communion, the “joining of hands”, in other words, the communion of saints, to which we are all connected.<sup>940</sup>

The idea that is “crucial” to overcome excarnation in this immanent spiritual vision (“the spiritual is *always* incarnate”) is the universal “joining of hands” in communion: a theological depiction of embodied solidarity—the ethical precondition of socialism.

To comprehend Taylor’s theme of “excarnation” in a wider context, short mention should be made of Jeanyne Slettom’s unpublished PhD thesis, “Theoanthroposis: A Process Soteriology” (2007), which reworked the Christian meta-narrative of salvation around the organizing principle of “excarnation” as alienation from the divine aim of embodied life.<sup>941</sup>

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<sup>936</sup> ASA, 747.

<sup>937</sup> ASA, 748

<sup>938</sup> ASA, 751

<sup>939</sup> ASA, 751

<sup>940</sup> ASA, 751.

<sup>941</sup> Jeanyne Slettom, “Theoanthroposis: A Process Soteriology,” PhD Thesis, Claremont Graduate University, 2007, 200.

Like Taylor, she asserted, “deification is the aim of the divine pedagogy”, but her constructive theological project was more explicitly unorthodox.<sup>942</sup> Christologically, she explained that her Whiteheadian-process metaphysic does not “make an ontological exception for Jesus” but instead “retains his uniqueness both in the degree to which he realized the divine aim and by the way his life and ministry become for Christians the subjective form by which they apprehend God and the world.”<sup>943</sup> Hence Slettom writes, “it is not so much that Jesus reveals God *to us*, as he reveals God *in us*.”<sup>944</sup> Even if Slettom had published her dissertation, this kind of language would have precluded a sympathetic reception from the Evangelicals or traditionalist Catholics who have found much to appreciate in Taylor’s less systematic and more affectively orientated presentation of excarnation.

Taylor’s Gramscian calibration of his discourse has facilitated both its wide reception and its constructive utility for Socialist intellectuals. It has a capacity to mediate high and low culture. His student Kearney, for instance, in both his scholarship and opinion pieces, has been able to expand and develop the relationship between “excarnation”, embodiment, “enchantment”, Eco-phenomenology, and Socialism.<sup>945</sup> This nexus of interrelated ideas is a germinative locus of Taylor’s thought, and will be an important aspect of his legacy. Bruno Latour, similarly, developed actor–network theory as a post-foundationalist interpretative paradigm, which also cultivates an affective sense of immersion or embeddedness in the “collective” with a view to ecological renewal and Socialist policy.<sup>946</sup> Both Latour and Taylor share an affection for Péguy; Latour wrote his

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<sup>942</sup> Ibid., 102; cf. *ASA*, 278, 668.

<sup>943</sup> Slettom, “Theoanthroposis,” 102.

<sup>944</sup> Ibid., 198. Emphasis original.

<sup>945</sup> Kearney, *Touch*, 6; Richard Kearney and Brian Treanor, eds. *Carnal Hermeneutics* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2015), 56.

<sup>946</sup> Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

*thèse de troisième cycle* on Péguy's *Clio*, and made it the topic of his "first-ever public lecture in 1973."<sup>947</sup> Where Taylor argued that the Platonic notion of eternity outside linear time fostered a mechanistic outlook that failed to understand the present, Latour is less guarded about the political implications of Péguy's socialist Bergsonianism: "Capitalism nullifies the discontinuity of time... This is precisely what Péguy fights against tirelessly".<sup>948</sup> Taylor sowed the seed for this critical perspective to grow in his reader's mind with Gramscian discretion; Latour stated it baldly. Yet through his obscurantism Taylor has cultivated a wide readership in the church; Latour and Slettom have not. Still, following Péguy, Latour and Taylor both agree that the classical linear conception of temporality, once secularised in Western modernity, reduces to the aphorism: time is money. Their common critical agenda extends through to environmentalism, where Péguy's influence remains perceptible in Latour's endeavour to develop a theoretical framework for human embeddedness in the world that recognises non-human agency. Kearney's programmatic statement in *Carnal Hermeneutics* (2015) sought to augment this, given the "broad sense of a reengagement" with "the medium of lived flesh" and the "flesh of the world", "which calls for a new environmental hermeneutics based on eco-phenomenology and extending to nonhuman forms of life."<sup>949</sup> According to Maija Kūle, eco-phenomenology "has become one of the main projects of phenomenology."<sup>950</sup> And, "[o]ne of the main concerns of eco-phenomenology is to describe the Unity-of-Everything-there-is-alive, looking at life's individuation and existential sharing-in-life."<sup>951</sup> Taylor's influence extends to the heart of eco-phenomenology: "The aesthetics of enchantment are close together with the passion of

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<sup>947</sup> Bruno Latour and Tim Howles, "Charles Péguy: Time, Space, and 'le Monde Moderne'," *New Literary History*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2015): 41–62, 42.

<sup>948</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>949</sup> Kearney and Treanor, *Carnal Hermeneutics*, 3.

<sup>950</sup> Maija Kūle, "Eco-Phenomenology: Philosophical Sources and Main Concepts," in *Eco-Phenomenology: Life, Human Lives, Post-Human Life in the Harmony of the Cosmos*, 43–58, eds. William S. Smith, Jadwiga S. Smith, and Daniela Verducci (Cham: Springer, 2018), 45.

<sup>951</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

the skies, light, darkness, enjoyment, and human positioning in the Cosmos.”<sup>952</sup> The opposite of “excarnation” is embodied “enchantment” i.e., unalienated solidarity with the life of the world.

### III

#### FROM ALIENATION TO ENCHANTMENT

Taylor’s ideals of “enchantment” and “transcendence” might be jarring for more traditionally minded Christian readers who expect a confessing Roman Catholic to speak clearly of “faith”, “grace”, and “salvation”. But this expectation is shown to be misplaced once it is understood that Taylor sees his Catholicism as one possible source of affective and ethical nourishment sustaining a commitment to socialist humanism. The utility of a word like “enchantment” for this project becomes evident considering Gramsci’s aphorism: “Identity of terms does not mean identity of concepts.”<sup>953</sup> One interpreter summarized Gramsci’s strategy for cultural Marxism by illustrating the potency of this insight:

it is the actual struggle between two hegemonic principles for the ‘appropriation’ (not the imposition) of ideological elements that may result in the eventual disarticulation of the previous ideological terrain and the rearticulation of ideological elements into a new form which then expresses a new collective will and serves as the new basis of consensus and effective hegemonic rule.<sup>954</sup>

Hence the ingenuity of Taylor’s term “enchanted”: an atheist can say they are “enchanted” by a beautiful view; a Roman Catholic, following Taylor, might now say they are “enchanted” by God’s grace in the eucharist. Both have different things in mind, but they have adopted a common vocabulary that Taylor has developed to disarticulate the previous ideological terrain (i.e., the atheist’s reductionism and the Catholic’s soteriology), and create a new basis of (pluralist) consensus. Such moments of “enchantment” can be taken as wide-

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<sup>952</sup> Ibid.

<sup>953</sup> *MPOW*, 116.

<sup>954</sup> Valeriano Ramos, Jr., “The Concepts of Ideology, Hegemony, and Organic Intellectuals in Gramsci’s Marxism,” *Theoretical Review*, no. 27 (1982): n.p.

ranging fruit from “the multiple spiritual sources of solidarity, and a renewed sense of awe and wonder at the natural order which nourishes us”; in this way Taylor sought to underwrite the ethics of Socialist Humanism with feelings of personal contentment to offset desire for the stimulation that comes from anti-social behaviour.<sup>955</sup> To co-exist and co-operate in a modern socialist society marked by pluralism, people will need to cultivate a mutually reinforcing sense of solidarity and “enchantment”. This evokes the interrelated task to remedy the excarnation of life, which produces a disenchanting sense of alienation. So, when Kearney asked Taylor: “How do we undo the excarnational character of our modern age and of our modern church?”<sup>956</sup> Taylor responded by expounding the need for an enchanting vision of embodied solidarity drawn from Péguy:

We need to retrieve and perhaps reinvent a new religious imaginary...I am thinking, for example, of Charles Péguy’s notion of “fidelity” to a larger believing community beyond the isolated individual, and his embrace of universal salvation for all living beings. Even animals are part of his eschatological vision!<sup>957</sup>

As noted above, *A Secular Age* discussed Péguy’s response to “what we have been calling ‘excarnation’, in particular the exaltation of disengaged reason as the royal road to knowledge, even in human affairs.”<sup>958</sup> This was an allusion to the instrumental stance taken towards society through social engineering. The “crucial concept of *fidélité*”, which Taylor stressed to Kearney, was described in *A Secular Age* as,

a faithfulness to the tradition which precisely excluded just going back. Going back was a betrayal, because it replaced a creative continuation of the past with a mechanical reproduction of it... the very attempt to engineer such a change means treating society as an inert object to be shaped, precisely the stance which Péguy meant to avoid. In his final judgement both Left and Right suffered from the same incapacity, they both wanted to engineer reality...they couldn’t appeal to the creative action of the people.<sup>959</sup>

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<sup>955</sup> Taylor, “Charles Taylor Responds,” 810.

<sup>956</sup> Kearney and Taylor, “Transcendent Humanism in a Secular Age,” 83.

<sup>957</sup> Ibid.

<sup>958</sup> ASA, 746.

<sup>959</sup> ASA, 747–748.

Decades on from his debate with E. P. Thompson regarding Soviet Communism and the pitfalls of Marxist humanism, Taylor was still seeking to retrieve theological resources for a form of socialism that would preserve the autonomy and creative freedom of the people—but which also recognised the fact of modern pluralism and sought to build these disparate outlooks and diverse modes of “enchantment” into a sense of solidarity. Taylor’s appreciation for the Péguyean religious imaginary, “the faith of the Incarnation.... the “joining of hands” ...the communion of saints, to which we are all connected” relates to what he learned from Marx.<sup>960</sup> As he wrote, in 1957,

This was surely one of Marx’s greatest insights...that Communism could not be primarily an ethical idea, that the problem was one of incarnating values in history, and that could only be accomplished if these values were embodied in the life of a political force which could mould history.<sup>961</sup>

In *A Secular Age*, this political force was the “network of agape”. Following Ivan Illich, Taylor critiqued the welfare state as the alienating bureaucratization of the Church’s care for the poor. Then he offered a reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan, which aligned with what he appreciated in Marx:

What the story is opening for us is not a universal set of rules, applying anywhere and everywhere, but another way of being. This involves on one hand a new motivation, and on the other, a new kind of community...based on a strong sense of “we”, more fundamental than the “I”...[still, the Samaritan’s compassion] is a free act of his “I”...It creates a new kind of fittingness, belonging together, between Samaritan and wounded Jew. They are fitted together in a disymmetric proportionality [i.e., “from each according to his ability to each according to his need”] which comes from God, which is that of agape and which became possible because God became flesh. The enfleshment of God extends outward, through such new links...into a network, which we call the Church. But this is a network, not a categorical grouping; that is, it is a skein of relations which link particular, unique, enfleshed people to each other, rather than a grouping of people together on the grounds of sharing some

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<sup>960</sup> ASA, 751.

<sup>961</sup> Taylor, “Marxism and Humanism,” 95.

important property...It resembles earlier kin networks in this regard.<sup>962</sup>

Taylor's reading of this parable draws together his desire to see socialist values incarnated in history, not applied from above as an abstract ethical ideal, and freely embodied in an organic network of solidarity. True membership in the Church therefore is not based on one's baptism or faith in Christ or being born again but is constituted by embodied acts of divine love that bring one into this network, Taylor implies. Terrifyingly, this had its predicate in Taylor's reading of Hegel's vision of the consummation of *Geist*, "then the process starts by which these loose skeins of private relations are united into the common overarching will which is inseparable from the state."<sup>963</sup> His point that this network "resembles earlier kin networks" harkens back to his 1967 paper for the Slant Symposium:

The problem is to find a new basis for a radical socialism...in primitive society all these communities, that of God, of society, of the family, are one...the task of socialism is still to focus the common purpose and bring about the primacy of collective control...socialists need a renewed conception of the goal at which they aim, in short, of the socialist society.<sup>964</sup>

Therefore, with his constructive theological proposal to reimagine the Communion of Saints as a network of agape, Charles Taylor, as "a sort of Catholic Marxist," has sought to articulate and share an enchanting vision of this renewed conception of the socialist society. Taylor's re-enchantment means casting a politically bewitching spell.

#### I V

#### SALVATION NOT ENCHANTMENT

It might seem surprising to think that Taylor's work could have an impact on the study of the colonial British Puritan, Jonathan Edwards, but that is a demonstrable aspect of his

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<sup>962</sup> ASA, 738–739. See also, "the kingdom involves another kind of solidarity altogether, one which would bring us into a network of agape." ASA, 158

<sup>963</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 398.

<sup>964</sup> Taylor, "From Marxism to the Dialogue Society," in *From Culture to Revolution*, 148, 162, 173, 180.

influence. Taylor's historical and philosophical work to "redo the tree" of Western social philosophy through *Sources of the Self* was effectually grafted into Amy Plantinga Pauw's study, *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (2002).<sup>965</sup> A paragraph from Pauw's book illustrates this dissertation's thesis:

Edwards's use of *person* to express trinitarian distinctions had theological perils. Charles Taylor has described the rise of "atomistic individualism" among the intellectual elite of Europe during Edwards's time, a vision of society as constituted by individuals for the fulfillment [*sic*] of ends that were primarily individual. On this view persons "start off as political atoms." A person is first of all an individual, and only subsequently in relations with others. Establishing the prior consent of individuals to form a community was thus the first step of seventeenth-century contract theory. As we will see in the next chapter, Edwards's development of the covenant of redemption in isolation from the relational themes of the psychological model for the Trinity fell prey to this atomistic view of personhood.<sup>966</sup>

Pauw criticised Edwards's use of the word *person* in trinitarian theology—despite the fact it originated with Tertullian (b. 160)—because of Taylor's critical genealogy of Western capitalism. Such has been the success of Taylor's project in constructing an overarching historical framework for the development of Western culture that monographs like Pauw's might develop their findings within his paradigmatic social theory even if it yields conclusions that are plainly false. Is the cultural work of the myth prince now a *fait accompli*?

In *A Secular Age*, Taylor moved through a reinterpretation and reworking of Western political philosophy to pursue a modern reformulation of religion. The opening of his "Conversions" chapter proposed: "We need to enlarge our palette of such points of contact with fullness" and suggested that Jonathan Edwards's testimony of encounter with the "transcendent" offered something valuable. With his political goal in view, Taylor

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<sup>965</sup> Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 77, 126, 144.

<sup>966</sup> *Ibid.*, 77. Emphasis original.

developed a hermeneutical approach to a pluralist *Heilsgeschichte*. He suggested that Edwards, “lived in a world where the wrath of God was a powerful presence, and where the difficulty was to come to an adequate sense of God’s universal love. One can respond to this difference polemically, and judge that one or other was bang-on right, and the other quite wrong. We condemn Edwards as caught in an old mode, or ourselves as having watered down the faith. But we can also see it in another light.”<sup>967</sup> Following this rhetorical framing,

Taylor suggested:

Neither of us grasps the whole picture. None of us could ever grasp alone everything that is involved in our alienation from God and his action to bring us back. But there are a great many of us, scattered through history who have had some powerful sense of some facet of this drama. Together we can live it more fully than any of us could alone. Instead of reaching immediately for the weapons polemic, we might better listen for a voice which we could never have assumed ourselves, whose tone might have been forever unknown to us if we hadn’t strained to understand it. We will find that we have to extend this courtesy to people who would never have extended it to us (like Jonathan Edwards)—in that respect, perhaps we have made some modest headway towards truth in the last couple of centuries, although we can certainly find precedents in the whole history of Christianity. Our faith is not the acme of Christianity, but nor is it a degenerate version; it should rather be open to a conversation that ranges over the whole of the last 20 centuries (and in some ways even before).<sup>968</sup>

“Everything connects” and this proposal echoed his conclusion in “The Politics of Recognition” based on the philosophy of Herder. Taylor’s proposal claimed to extend a courtesy to Edwards, but it committed an act of misrecognition of the meaning of his life. Although it is couched in the persuasive rhetoric that none of us grasps “the whole picture” (apart from Taylor, who seemingly grasps the authoritative frame) and so we must not reach for “the weapons of polemic” (excepting Taylor, who can critique idolators), and “we” should be encouraged that “we” are “making modest headway towards truth” (in slowly

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<sup>967</sup> ASA, 753–754.

<sup>968</sup> ASA, 754.

coming to accept Taylor's vision), this proposal is incompatible with the ecclesiastical-historical master narrative of the history of redemption as the story of God's loving kindness in redeeming his elect by the saving work of his one and only Son.

Taylor acknowledged that arbitrating competing religious visions, "leaves us with an immense set of messy hermeneutical issues: how the different approaches relate to each other; how they relate together to questions of overarching truth. We will never be without these issues; the belief that they can finally be set aside by some secure instance of authority, whether the Bible or the Pope, is a dangerous and damaging illusion."<sup>969</sup> The irony is that such an authoritative view of the Scripture was integral to Edwards's faith, which on one hand is a model of fullness yet also a "dangerous and damaging illusion". The lack of logical coherence to Taylor's philosophy of religion is circumvented by the teleological dimension of his soft historicist relativism wherein past Christian witness serves as an existential resource à la carte for a pluralist transcendence in the present.

Given Taylor's interest in straining to hear Edwards's voice, this section explicates how Taylor's proposal inflicts misrecognition on Edwards, by exploring his religious epistemology and his understanding of theological certainty as it developed from two of his early sermons to the *Religious Affections*.

In 1723, Jonathan Edwards preached a foundational sermon on religious epistemology in the small town of Bolton, Connecticut: "A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate."<sup>970</sup> The key idea that this twenty-year-old preacher expressed was that "spiritual knowledge of divine things consists in a certain clear apprehension and lively infixed sensibleness of them that the godly have, which wicked men

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<sup>969</sup> ASA, 754.

<sup>970</sup> WJE, vol. 14, 67–96.

are destitute of.”<sup>971</sup> He illustrated this religious epistemology with an analogous reference to historical epistemology:

When we read an history of a thing that was acted many centuries or years ago...perhaps we think it may be probably true: yet we have not at all the same kind of conceptions of the matter as one that was present upon the spot...although perhaps we have read and studied the history so much that we can tell the story better than he that was present. The thing is, we han't so lively an apprehension of the things that were done as those that were present; and therefore the things don't affect us at all [in] the same manner as it did in the time the persons that were actually concerned in the matter. The matter don't seem so real to us. The apprehension is nothing near so lively.

So the difference of the knowledge of the spiritual man from the knowledge of the natural man is of the same kind: for the eyes of believers are opened, they do as it were see divine things. There is a certain intenseness and sensibleness in their apprehension of [them], a certain seeing and feeling. It is difficult fully to express what it is, but there is truly a spiritual light that the wicked have not, nor cannot have.<sup>972</sup>

According to Edwards, witnesses of events have a direct and affecting knowledge of them while readers of history have an indirect knowledge that does not generate the same affect. Analogously, the godly have a direct and affecting spiritual knowledge of God in Christ according to the Spirit's work of regeneration while the unregenerate have an indirect “notional” knowledge of the things of God. It has been noted that Edwards utilized Lockean epistemology for this aspect of his theology.<sup>973</sup> This was plain in his sermon: “There is direct knowledge, and there is reflex knowledge. The direct knowledge is the knowledge the Christian hath of divine things”.<sup>974</sup> For “Christ came to open the eyes of the blind” and he gives his chosen ones “a sight of the truth and reality of spiritual things.”<sup>975</sup> “The futurities of heaven and eternal judgment, they appear as real unto those that are spiritual.” But to unregenerate souls that are dead in sin, “they are like a mere dream, a fable of the

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<sup>971</sup> *WJE*, vol. 14, 74.

<sup>972</sup> *WJE*, vol. 14, 75.

<sup>973</sup> Michael McClymond and Gerald McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 383–384.

<sup>974</sup> *WJE*, vol. 14, 80.

<sup>975</sup> *WJE*, vol. 14, 77.

imagination.”<sup>976</sup> In six points Edwards explained why the unregenerate were lost and deprived of this knowledge: (1) their “hardness of heart”; (2) the “blinding and deceitfulness” of sin that overpowers their minds; (3) because “Satan has kingdom in wicked men’s hearts. There he has a throne, and there he makes his residence...He must be cast out by God’s almighty power before any divine understanding will find admittance”; (4) because of their love of sinful pleasure and the “lusts of the flesh”; (5) their “[w]orldlymindedness”; and (6) their “pride”.<sup>977</sup> The gracious light of saving spiritual knowledge, Edwards explained, was procured by “the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ” its “immediate efficient cause is the Holy Spirit” while “the means whereby this knowledge is communicated to us is his Word” and the “foundation of this spiritual knowledge is a regeneration of the heart”.<sup>978</sup> He then concluded his sermon with practical applications.<sup>979</sup> Taylor’s philosophy of religion was based on the claim that “[n]one of us could ever grasp on our own everything that is involved in our alienation from God and his action to bring us back”—granted, but Edwards’s point was that saved people do grasp something of this redemptive work with certainty by God’s grace—which is mutually exclusive with other religious perspectives—e.g. that Jesus is the Christ.

Ten years later, in August 1733, Edwards preached one of his most well-known sermons to his congregation in Northampton: “A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, Shown to be Both a Scriptural and Rational Doctrine.”<sup>980</sup> It was published in Boston in 1734, and as Mark Valeri noted in his introduction to it in the Yale edition of Edwards’s works, this sermon “set forth many of the themes that undergirded his preaching through the Great Awakening.”<sup>981</sup> Edwards’s text was

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<sup>976</sup> *WJE*, vol. 14, 78.

<sup>977</sup> *WJE*, vol. 14, 85–87.

<sup>978</sup> *WJE*, vol. 14, 89.

<sup>979</sup> *WJE*, vol. 14, 89–96.

<sup>980</sup> *WJE*, vol. 17, 406.

<sup>981</sup> *WJE*, vol. 17, 405.

Matthew 16:17: “And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my father which is in heaven.” The words of the Lord Jesus to the apostle Peter after Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Christ. Throughout this sermon, Edwards identified Peter’s experience with the contemporary believer’s experience. In both cases, it is by illuminating rays of the Spirit’s grace that God “imparts this knowledge immediately, not making use of any intermediate natural causes, as he does in other knowledge.”<sup>982</sup> Edwards was articulating the gracious epistemic dimension of the believer’s knowledge of the gospel—their illumined knowledge of Christ’s work wrought by the Spirit in their salvation. In contrast with the aesthetics of enchantment:

This spiritual and divine light does not consist in any impression made upon the imagination.... spiritual light is not that impression upon the imagination, but an exceeding different thing from it. Natural men may have lively impressions on their imaginations; and we cannot determine but the devil, who transforms himself into an angel of light, may cause imaginations of an outward beauty, or visible glory, and of sounds and speeches, and other such things; but these are things of a vastly inferior nature to spiritual light.<sup>983</sup>

To safeguard against their being misled into false teaching or false assurance of salvation, Edwards told his listeners that this spiritual light “only gives a due apprehension of those things that are taught in the word of God.”<sup>984</sup> It illumines existing revelation, it does not suggest any “new truths or doctrines”.<sup>985</sup> Nor is this spiritual light constitutive of merely religious affections in general:

It is not every affecting view that men have of the things of religion that is this spiritual and divine light. Men by mere principles of nature are capable of being affected with things that have a special relation to religion as well as other things. A person by mere nature, for instance, may be liable to be affected with the story of Jesus Christ, and the sufferings he underwent, as well as by any other tragical story: he may be the more affected with it from the interest

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<sup>982</sup> *WJE*, vol. 17, 409.

<sup>983</sup> *WJE*, vol. 17, 412.

<sup>984</sup> *WJE*, vol. 17, 412.

<sup>985</sup> *WJE*, vol. 17, 412.

he conceives mankind to have in it: yea, he may be affected with it without believing it; as well as a man may be affected with what he reads in a romance, or sees acted in a stage play. He may be affected with a lively and eloquent description of many pleasant things that attend the state of the blessed in heaven, as well as his imagination be entertained by a romantic description of the pleasantness of fairy land, or the like.<sup>986</sup>

Rather, this divine light blesses the believer's soul by shining "a true sense of the divine excellency of the things revealed in the word of God, and a conviction of the truth and reality of them thence arising."<sup>987</sup> Such is the nature of a gracious illumination of the heart and mind by the Spirit of the living God: "He that is spiritually enlightened truly apprehends and sees it, or has a sense of it. He don't merely rationally believe that God is glorious but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart."<sup>988</sup> As Edwards developed this teaching for his congregation, he explained the importance of this sense: "Such a conviction of the truth of religion as this, arising, these ways, from a sense of the divine excellency of them, is that true spiritual conviction that there is in saving faith. And this original of it, is that by which it is most essentially distinguished from that common assent, which unregenerate men are capable of."<sup>989</sup> So after carefully defining the nature of this gracious experience, Edwards reiteratively explained that it is inherent to saving faith and qualitatively different from an unilluminated knowledge of the gospel that can be attained by mere natural means. Nevertheless, in regeneration it is through a person's use of their natural faculties that the essential knowledge of Christ's redemptive work is attained, but the divine light illuminates this knowledge so that it becomes saving in the elect person's heart.

It is not intended that the natural faculties are not made use of in it. The natural faculties are the subject of this light: and they are the subject in such a manner, that they are not merely passive, but active in it; the acts and exercises of man's understanding are concerned and made use of in it. God, in letting in this light into the soul, deals with man according to his nature, or as a rational creature; and makes

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<sup>986</sup> *WJE*, vol. 17, 412.

<sup>987</sup> *WJE*, vol. 17, 412.

<sup>988</sup> *WJE*, vol. 17, 413.

<sup>989</sup> *WJE*, vol. 17, 415.

use of his human faculties... As the use that we make of our eyes in beholding various objects, when the sun arises, is not the cause of the light that discovers those objects to us.<sup>990</sup>

As he elucidated its affective dimensions, Edwards was emphatic that he was referring to a true and certain epistemic revelation. “This knowledge, or sight of God and Christ, cannot be a mere speculative knowledge; because it is spoken of as a seeing and knowing, wherein they differ from the ungodly. And by these Scriptures it must not only be a different knowledge in degree and circumstances, and different in its effects; but it must be entirely different in nature and kind.”<sup>991</sup> Citing 2 Peter 1:16, Edwards forcefully communicated the significance of this religious epistemology for the edification of his hearers. “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” He then drew the connection that Peter had beheld “that visible glory of Christ” which he had seen “in the transfiguration” and so Edwards reasoned, “if a sight of Christ’s outward glory might give a rational assurance of his divinity, why may not an apprehension of his spiritual glory do so too?” “Doubtless, therefore,” Edwards concluded, “he that has had a clear sight of the spiritual glory of Christ, may say, I have not followed cunningly devised fables, but have been an eyewitness of his majesty, upon as good grounds as the apostle, when he had respect to the outward glory of Christ that he had seen.”<sup>992</sup> To Edwards’s mind, this epistemic revelation by the Spirit’s illumination of the Scripture was “as good a grounds as the apostle” for the blessed and certain knowledge that Jesus is the Messiah revealed by his Father who is in heaven. This knowledge does not enchant the imagination—it is not based on “cunningly devised fables”—but effects the salvation of the soul.

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<sup>990</sup> *WJE*, vol. 17, 416.

<sup>991</sup> *WJE*, vol. 17, 417.

<sup>992</sup> *WJE*, vol. 17, 419.

This religious epistemology was central to Edwards's account of truly gracious affections in his *Religious Affections* of 1746. That text was a painstaking exposition of the nature of true grace in a person's life, written by Edwards in his forties and in retrospect of his ministry during the Great Awakening. The first sign he delineated concerned the ontological foundation of gracious affections: "Affections that are truly spiritual and gracious, do arise from those influences and operations on the heart, which are *spiritual*, *supernatural* and *divine*."<sup>993</sup> The fourth and fifth signs provide clear insight into Edwards's soteriology regarding Taylor's proposal to take it as a model of "fullness". The fourth sign that Edwards discerned was: "Gracious affections do arise from the mind's being enlightened, rightly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine things."<sup>994</sup> His description of this sign renders his theology mutually exclusive from Taylor's vision.

This sort of understanding or knowledge is that knowledge of divine things from whence all truly gracious affections do proceed: by which therefore all affections are to be tried. Those affections that arise wholly from any other kind of knowledge, or do result from any other apprehensions of mind, are vain.<sup>995</sup>

Edwards condemns as vanity religious affections that spring from any other source than the grace of the Holy Spirit in revealing the glory of God in the knowledge of Jesus Christ as redeemer and Lord. When the reader strains to listen for Edwards's theology in context, his voice resists sublimation to the liberal pluralist philosophy of religion and acts as a powerful countervailing force. This specific content of Edwards's faith is inextricable from his experience of what Taylor called "fullness". The testimony inherent in Edwards's fifth sign is categorically incompatible with the liberal pluralist philosophy of religion Taylor communicated to Kearney ("we are part of one hermeneutical family, accepting that we know nothing for certain about the transcendent"): "Truly gracious affections are attended

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<sup>993</sup> *WJE*, vol. 2, 197. Emphasis original.

<sup>994</sup> *WJE*, vol. 2, 266.

<sup>995</sup> *WJE*, vol. 2, 275.

with a reasonable and spiritual conviction of the judgement, of the reality and certainty of divine things.”<sup>996</sup> It was clearly essential to Edwards’s “fullness” that there is a specific and definite grasp of the revelation of God’s grace in Christ that sustains gracious affections. Edwards explained that these convictions become “points settled and determined, as undoubted and indisputable”.<sup>997</sup> Developing the themes latent in his earlier sermons, Edwards stressed that this conviction was wrought by a gracious epistemic revelation and not the mere cultivation of a feeling. The truths of the gospel, Edwards wrote,

Have the influence of real and certain things upon them; they have the weight and power of real things in their hearts; and accordingly rule in their affections, and govern them through the course of their lives. With respect to Christ’s being the Son of God, and Saviour of the world, and the great things he has revealed concerning himself, and his Father, and another world, they have not only a predominating opinion that these things are true, and so yield their assent, as they do in many other matters of doubtful speculation; but they really see that it is so: their eyes are opened, so that they see that really Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.<sup>998</sup>

In continuity with what he had preached in 1723 that Christ opens the eyes of the spiritually blind and gives them “a sight of the truth and reality of spiritual things.”<sup>999</sup> Edwards wrote in 1746 that in a person’s conversion unto Christ, “they really see that it is so: their eyes are opened, so that they see”. For Edwards, the Christian’s faith is not an interpretation, it is direct knowledge of the triune God’s redemptive work wrought by the Spirit. “That all true Christians have such a kind of conviction of the truth of the things of the gospel,” Edwards claimed, “is abundantly manifest from the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>1000</sup> He cited fourteen biblical passages to illustrate his point, beginning with the text of his 1733 sermon, Matthew 16:15–17. “Therefore” Edwards concluded, “truly gracious affections are attended with such a kind of conviction and persuasion of the truth of the things of the gospel, and sight of their

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<sup>996</sup> *WJE*, vol. 2, 291.

<sup>997</sup> *WJE*, vol. 2, 291.

<sup>998</sup> *WJE*, vol. 2, 292.

<sup>999</sup> *WJE*, vol. 14, 77.

<sup>1000</sup> *WJE*, vol. 2, 292.

evidence and reality, as these and other Scriptures speak of.”<sup>1001</sup> He described this revelation of the “divine glory” of the gospel as “direct, clear, and all-conquering evidence”.<sup>1002</sup> He illustrated the power of its effects with reference to the limitations of historical knowledge alone in furnishing robust Christian faith. “Unless men may come to a reasonable solid persuasion and conviction of the truth of the gospel...by the sight of its glory; ’tis impossible that those who are illiterate, and unacquainted with history, should have any thorough and effectual conviction of it at all.”<sup>1003</sup> Edwards noted that through the ages illiterate people with little grasp of historical apologetics have been blessed with such conviction of the truth of the gospel as to endure suffering and die for their faith. “The true martyrs of Jesus Christ,” Edwards wrote, “are not those who have only been strong in opinion that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true, but those that have seen the truth of it; as the very name of martyrs or witnesses (by which they are called in Scripture) implies.”<sup>1004</sup> In developing this point, Edwards returned to a theme of his “A Divine and Supernatural Light” sermon:

The true martyrs of Jesus Christ are called his witnesses: and all the saints, who by their holy practice under great trials, declare that faith, which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen are called witnesses (Heb. 11:1 and 12:1); because by their profession and practice, they declare their assurance of the truth and divinity of the gospel, having had the eyes of their minds enlightened, to see the divinity in the gospel, or to behold that unparalleled, ineffably excellent, and truly divine glory shining in it, which is altogether distinguishing, evidential, and convincing: so that they may truly be said to have seen God in it, and to have seen that it is indeed divine: and so can speak in the style of witnesses; and not only say, that they think the gospel is divine, but say, that it is divine, giving it in as their testimony because they have seen it to be so.<sup>1005</sup>

Contemporary Christians, Edwards taught, can call themselves witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ because they have beheld his glory in the Scripture with directness, immediacy, and

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<sup>1001</sup> *WJE*, vol. 2, 293.

<sup>1002</sup> *WJE*, vol. 2, 298.

<sup>1003</sup> *WJE*, vol. 2, 303.

<sup>1004</sup> *WJE*, vol. 2, 306.

<sup>1005</sup> *WJE*, vol. 2, 306.

certainty, according to the illumination of the Spirit. Edwards concluded this point by acknowledging that “there is a great variety of degrees of strength of faith,” but nevertheless, “there is no true and saving faith, or spiritual conviction of the judgement, of the truth of the gospel, that has nothing in it, of this manifestation of internal evidence, in some degree.”<sup>1006</sup> In Edwards’s theology, all Christians are witnesses because they have “seen the truth” of the gospel of Jesus Christ’s saving power and submit to the moral authority of his teaching.

This section began by observing how Taylor’s historical writing in *Sources of the Self* had already impacted the study of Edwards in at least one instance, it draws to a close by noting how Taylor’s philosophy of religion in *A Secular Age* is coming to bear on contemporary expressions of Edwards’s theology in another. In her contribution to the collection of essays, *Aspiring to Fullness in A Secular Age* (2014), Jennifer A. Herdt, Professor of Christian Ethics at Yale Divinity School, wrote, “*A Secular Age* develops a vital corrective for a certain kind of bad faith to which contemporary religious adherents are prone and offers a compelling vision of a communion of disparate itineraries toward God, linked in an ever expanding network of agape.”<sup>1007</sup> Evidently the cultural work of the myth prince permeates the domain of Christian ethics, at the interface of high and low culture, and slowly galvanizing the collective will towards socialism. In her critique of “bad faith” Herdt cited Taylor’s critical interpretation of religious conviction as the “false certainty of closure”.<sup>1008</sup> Was Edwards’s model of “fullness”, which placed such considered weight on spiritual certainty ultimately bad faith? Sartre first articulated the concept of bad faith, and though neither Taylor nor Herdt cite him directly it is worth explaining how Edwards’s theology addresses Sartre’s misunderstanding. Sartre argued that “[t]he condition of possibility of bad

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<sup>1006</sup> *WJE*, vol. 2, 307.

<sup>1007</sup> Jennifer A. Herdt, “The Authentic Individual in the Network of Agape,” in *Aspiring to Fullness in a Secular Age: Essays on Religion and Theology in the Work of Charles Taylor*, 191–216, eds. Carlos D. Colorado and Justin D. Klassen (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014).

<sup>1008</sup> *Ibid.*, 201; *ASA*, 769.

faith is that human-reality, in its most proximate being, in the internal structure of the prereflective *cogito*, should be what it is not and not be what it is.”<sup>1009</sup> Or as he put it more clearly:

If I was not courageous in the way in which an inkwell is not a table—which is to say, if I was isolated in my cowardice, stubbornly sticking to it and incapable of relating to its opposite—or if I was not capable of *determining* myself as cowardly—which is to say of negating any courage in relation to myself, and thereby escaping from my cowardice at the very moment in which I posit it—or if it was not necessarily *impossible* for me to coincide with my *not-being-courageous* (just as with my *being-cowardly*), any project of bad faith would be ruled out.<sup>1010</sup>

In Edwards’s theology of regeneration, it is necessarily impossible for being a Christian to possibly coincide with not being a Christian as conversion is the sovereign reconstitution and renovation of one’s entire self by the Spirit of God—in modern terms, a spiritual recreation at the level of one’s prereflective *cogito* that graciously gives a permanent certainty to one’s trust in Christ. True Christians can fall (Peter denied Christ after his illumination) but their faith is preserved (“I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail” (Lk. 22:32)). Edwards’s theology of illumination, in continuity with the Reformed tradition’s teaching of the *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti*, is therefore not impacted by Sartre’s critique of bad faith, which is the most sophisticated form.<sup>1011</sup> Taylor’s critique operates at the more popularly accessible level of a suspicious depth psychological reading of religious conviction. But a close reading of Taylor’s hermeneutic presents a self-evident and concerning line of theological response. From the larger context of Taylor’s critique of bad faith:

Too much reality is not only destabilizing; it can be dangerous. It will be so to the extent that we try to overcome our disorientation by the false certainty of closure, and then try to shore up this certainty

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<sup>1009</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 113.

<sup>1010</sup> *Ibid.*, 113–114.

<sup>1011</sup> A separate but related project might illustrate how Edwards’s theology renders Lessing’s ditch a misunderstanding as well given that Christian faith is not articulated in the form of a necessary truth of reason, but as responsive trust in illumined revelation.

by projecting the chaos and evil we feel within ourselves onto some enemy...

This argument was developed earlier with a quotation from T.S. Eliot:

“Human kind cannot bear much reality” (Eliot). We would all be shaken, destabilized, made distraught, by seeing God face to face, all of a sudden, now. We need to shut him out, to some degree, for the sake of a minimum equilibrium. The difference lies in where this equilibrium point falls for us.<sup>1012</sup>

This understanding of religious commitment as “minimum equilibrium” is too far removed from Edwards’s understanding of God’s grace to draw any meaningful parallels and the theological interpretation of those haunting words, “[w]e need to shut him out”, should be passed over in silence. In the last analysis, the ecclesiastical-historical reading of Edwards’s experience as redemption more authentically represents his experience and his self-understanding of the meaning of his life rather than commit an act of misrecognition against him. The ecclesiastical-historical focus also reveals the revolutionary socialist political vision inherent in Taylor’s philosophy of religion. The exposition of Edwards’s theology of illumination indicates promising lines of confessional and apologetic research for contemporary Reformed and Evangelical theologians.

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<sup>1012</sup> ASA, 769.

## Chapter Eight.

### Conclusion

*“Remember the former things of old; for I am God and there is no other; I am God and there is none like me.”*

—Isaiah 46:9

It is undeniable that *A Secular Age* constitutes a scholarly centre of gravity with its pull felt in numerous intellectual domains. Research projects in History, Theology, Sociology, Political Theory, Literary Studies, and Philosophy are often compelled to engage with it through at least an obligatory citation. Within ten years of publication there were over 100 published engagements with Taylor’s Master Narrative.<sup>1013</sup> There is a growing list of books and dissertations (including this one) where the phrase *in A Secular Age* provides the last four words of the title.<sup>1014</sup> In the short term, such engagements are only likely to increase in frequency.

This study has been the first dissertation-length critical examination of Taylor’s widely influential “story” of Western secularization. It has considered how *A Secular Age* emerged as a literary expression out of his intellectual biography. This approach brought many of Taylor’s forgotten sources to light. It showed how his 2007 *magnum opus* was orientated by ideas that were formatively encountered in the left-wing circles of 1940s Canada and 1950s Oxford and Paris. Future research projects might explore further the influence of these sources in his other works, or on other aspects of *A Secular Age*. If Taylor’s thought should be given an unwieldy label, perhaps it is a “Romantic liberal

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<sup>1013</sup> Zemmin, Jager, and Vanheeswijck, *Working with A Secular Age*, 1.

<sup>1014</sup> E.g., Dale C. Allison, *Encountering Mystery: Religious Experience in a Secular Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2022); Andre van der Braak, *Reimagining Zen in a Secular Age: Charles Taylor and Zen Buddhism in the West* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); David Newheiser, *Hope in a Secular Age: Deconstruction, Negative Theology and the Future of Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Daniel Scott Hendrickson, *Jesuit Higher Education in a Secular Age: a Response to Charles Taylor and the Crisis of Fullness* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2022).

Catholic socialist humanism”. That characterization seems at least to flag the important substantive elements. With regard to the sources of his scholarly approach, Antonio Gramsci and Maurice Merleau-Ponty stand behind his work: Merleau-Ponty provided the phenomenological method; Gramsci supplied the cultural and intellectual strategy. Other figures that Taylor has drawn from, such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger, have served as augmenting sources. What of Karl Marx’s influence? Taylor has criticised Marxist theory and sought to disaffiliate himself from Marx.<sup>1015</sup> His Romantic utopian socialism is without a trace of determinism. However, there are two elements of Marx’s influence that cannot be discounted: his liberationist theory which perceives capitalism as oppressive of human potentiality, connected to the anthropological insights of the 1844 manuscripts regarding the nature of alienation. Insofar as those themes are integral to his thought, Taylor can be called a Marxist. And Hegel? Taylor learned from Merleau-Ponty that Hegel’s philosophy was foundational for modern thought, and Taylor has argued that Hegel’s identification of the tension between two conflicting drives in modern Western culture—Romantic expressivism and mechanistic materialism—remains an accurate assessment of the origins of key dilemmas facing modern life and society.<sup>1016</sup>

Taylor’s project is a unique construction beyond these sources. This is clear considering Taylor’s aversion to the metaphysical determinism inherent in Hegel’s idea of conceptual necessity and his critique that the implausibility of Hegel’s ontology renders his system of Absolute Idealism void. Gramsci read the determinist theme of Classical German Philosophy, which underpinned scientific socialism, back to the theology of grace and predestination, and so did Taylor. In a passage of *A Secular Age* that draws together the themes of this dissertation, Taylor wrote,

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<sup>1015</sup> Taylor, “From Marxism to the Dialogue Society,” 180–181.

<sup>1016</sup> Taylor, *Hegel*, 3–50.

God's Providence is his ability to respond to whatever the universe and human agency throw up. God is like a skilled tennis player, who can always return the serve.... This also seems the obvious reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan. The question it is supposed to answer is: who is my neighbour? The answer surprises, in part because it takes us out of the skein of social relations in which we're embedded, and we're told of a Samaritan who rescues a Jew. But it also takes us beyond any established relation into the domain of accident or contingency...this accident can be the occasion for rebuilding a skein of human relations animated by agape. The Samaritan's action is part of God's response to the skewed serve the robbers have lobbed into history.

Of course, in order to take up this understanding, one has to abandon the notion that somewhere, there is a Total Plan; and of course, a fortiori, that we can figure it out. But this has been a tremendous temptation, particularly in Latin Christendom, and particularly in modern times. This was the stock in trade of certain theologians, e.g., Calvin, Janssen, who produced such repulsive results, that the main claimants to the Total Picture are now atheists, wielding theodicy like a club.<sup>1017</sup>

For Taylor, "everything connects" and this extract illustrates his master narrative of spiral form: there is an original unity, followed by disruption ("it takes us out of the skein of social relations in which we're embedded"), and then restoration in a higher unity ("rebuilding a skein of human relations animated by agape"). It also shows how his constructive pluralist ecclesiology addresses the problem to "find a new basis for radical socialism" and is centred on human freedom in implicit response to the pitfalls of scientific socialism—the "Total Plan" in "modern times"—from his liberal Catholic perspective. His philosophy of religion, his social and political theory, his Master Narrative, and his interpretation of early modern Protestantism are all interconnected in this way.

This dissertation set out to critically elucidate *A Secular Age's* "peculiar" and "unsubstitutable" quality, i.e., to render a clear interpretation of the nature of Taylor's intended affect and his strategies in generating it—through an analysis of his interpretation of early modern Protestantism. Taylor's rhetorical strategies and lines of argument as

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<sup>1017</sup> ASA, 278.

described in this dissertation—interpreting *A Secular Age* as a Gramscian-Sorelian Social Myth that seeks to cultivate solidarity and subvert capitalist hegemony in the tradition of socialist humanism—should now be rendered perceptible in any of his “interlocking essays”. In this sense, *A Secular Age* is a work of cultural Marxism.

The other objective which this dissertation articulated was to explore the explanatory power and hermeneutical dimensions of a theologically forthright ecclesiastical history. It sought to do this alongside its intellectual-biographical work and through the studies of John Calvin’s theology of the Lord’s Supper, Richard Baxter’s experiences of doubt and grace, and Jonathan Edwards’s description of divine illumination. The picture that emerged from those studies was of the Church as distinct from the World, even in an “enchanted” Protestant Christendom. Calvin understood the Lord’s Supper as the sacred food which strengthens the believer’s soul but effects the greater condemnation of the reprobate who takes it unworthily; Baxter had an appreciation for the preciousness of saving grace in Christ; and Edwards stressed the gracious epistemic dimension of a regenerate person’s certain knowledge of the gospel. In the descriptive accounts of Christian religion drawn from Baxter and Edwards, there was a distinctness to this experience of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ according to the power of the Holy Spirit to cleanse, renew, and fortify the believer’s soul. Their descriptions are misapprehended with the categories of “enchantment” or “fullness”. Familiarity with their experience gave the author insight into the flaws of Taylor’s understanding, which led into a larger work of spiritual discernment in assessing his project. “In our religious lives we are engaging with a transcendent reality”—that has been attested to through this dissertation—the question is, what kind of transcendent reality: is it a beguiling spirit or the Spirit of Christ?

Earlier the dissertation noted that these studies would culminate in a reflection on what their findings mean for religion today. It appears that despite the forces of

modernization and a relativism wrought by pluralisation there are still Christians who witness to the saving power of Lord Jesus Christ because they have beheld his power, authority, sacrificial love, and glory as the Son of God in the Scriptures, and he has renewed their soul by the work of his Spirit. They are not going to simply disappear, and the ecclesiastical-historical meta-narrative of salvation history explains the ongoing witness of this remnant in the West. Seen in a global perspective, there are many millions more people who profess faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God now than there were in 1850, and many since the coming of *A Secular Age*. It seems judgement has fallen on the West after the pattern described by the prophet Hosea:

When I fed them, they were satisfied;  
when they were satisfied, they became proud;  
then they forgot me. (Hos. 13:6)

This is essentially the Weberian account of secularization wrought by prosperity.<sup>1018</sup> Hopefully this dissertation can serve to bolster future research projects that seek to explain the expansion of Christian faith globally and the perseverance of a remnant in the modern West with a Scriptural hermeneutic—who knows where those studies will come from. “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (Jn. 3:8)

Finally, this dissertation began by noting that it was written after the type of a *theologia crucis*, meaning it set out to communicate a critical interpretation of Taylor’s work as a left-wing cultural project, regardless of the disdain that analysis might evoke from some quarters, and to render a theological critique of secularization as apostasy. If this dissertation has succeeded in articulating a persuasive interpretation of Taylor’s *oeuvre*, it has done it by adopting an intrinsically theological approach to ecclesiastical history. In that way, it stands as a witness to Christ’s work of redemption in a secular age. *Soli Deo Gloria*.

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<sup>1018</sup> Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, 118–119.

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