A Pragmatic Examination of A Secular Age

by

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Abstract

Inspired by William James' description of pragmatism, this thesis investigates some conceivable effects of Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*. It is argued that Taylor's articulation of a shared pre-ontological outlook, referred to as the immanent frame, is pragmatically valuable because it exposes and invalidates a pervasive entrenchment between people of varied metaphysical outlooks. This thesis begins by recapitulating Taylor's grand narrative explaining the origins and conditions of the immanent frame. It then analyzes selected works and social organizations created by Karen Armstrong and Paul Kurtz, which exemplify typical open and closed perspectives within the immanent frame. This analysis demonstrates how disparate agendas become appreciable as structurally opposed when recognized as typical orientations in the immanent frame, and how this recognition challenges each polemic. Finally, the Quebec Charter of Values is exposed as an attack on those who frame their lives in relation to something that transcends the immanent frame.

Keywords: Charles Taylor; *A Secular Age*; Karen Armstrong; Paul Kurtz; Pragmatic Value; Quebec Charter of Values

For my parents,

Who have worked tirelessly for their children.

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Introduction

On November 7, 2013, the Parti Quebecois introduced to the National Assembly of Quebec a bill that aimed to protect and affirm the values of state secularism and religious neutrality. This bill, which would become commonly known as the Quebec Charter of Values, sought to prohibit members of public bodies from wearing religious objects that indicate religious affiliation.[1] It was argued that such displays compromised the neutrality of the public body, and by extension, the neutrality of the government itself.

The charter insists that "personnel members of public bodies must maintain religious neutrality" in the exercise of their function.[2] This is a matter of reserving one's religious beliefs.[3] But reserve is not simply a matter of personal discretion; it is guaranteed through a prohibition of all religious symbols.

The proposed legislation provoked widespread backlash from Quebecois society. The Charter of Values was objectionable to so many because it clashed with fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In this case, a member of a public body is forced to forfeit freedom of religion and association because these are perceived to compromise the state's secularity, which is presented as a "fundamental value" of the "Quebecois nation."[4]

The charter is simultaneously articulate and vague. Drafters of the bill invested considerable effort in explaining exactly what needed to be restricted and from where. The definition of these public bodies is substantial and detailed. It includes governmental

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[1] Bill 60, *Charter affirming the values of State secularism and religious neutrality and of equality between women and men, and providing a framework for accommodation requests,* First Sess., 40th Legislature of the Quebec National Assembly, November 7, 2013, 6.

[2] Bill 60, 6.

[3] Bill 60, 6.

[4] Bill 60, 13.

departments, school boards, health and social services, and the National Assembly itself.[5] This aspect of the charter is well articulated. Yet the "values" served by the charter remain quite obscure. And this is particularly troubling, as the charter would have trampled over individual rights in pursuit of inarticulate ideals without a strong indication as to why.

In fact, the charter contains no explicit definition of secularism. It is certainly hostile to the presence of religious symbols within public bodies, which a generous reader could accept as a kind of definition through negation. In this case secularism means nothing more than an enforcement of dress restrictions and other forms of "reserve" on government personnel. But this sort of negative definition is clearly inadequate.

Some clue as to what is meant by secularism can be found in Section 40 of the charter, which proposes an amendment to Section 9.1 of the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. In its unaltered form, Section 9.1 insists that freedoms and rights must be kept congruent with Quebecois values:

> In exercising his fundamental freedoms and rights, a person shall maintain a proper regard for democratic values, public order and the general well-being of the citizens of Québec.
>
> In this respect, the scope of the freedoms and rights, and limits to their exercise, may be fixed by law.[6]

The amendment proposed in the Charter of Values would add the following after the first paragraph:

> In exercising those freedoms and rights, a person shall also maintain a proper regard for the values of equality between women and men and the primacy of the French language, as well as the separation of religions and

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[5] This list is not comprehensive; it is meant to show the breadth of those public bodies that would have been affected. For the full list of what are considered public bodies see "Schedule I" in Bill 60, 17.

[6] *Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms,* Éditeur Official du Quebec, updated November 1, 2014.
http://ww2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSeach/telecharge.php?type=2&file=/C_12/C12_A.html

State and the religious neutrality and secular nature of the State, while making allowance for the emblematic and toponymic elements of Quebec's cultural heritage that testify to its history.[7]

This amendment suggests the values of Quebecois society include a separation of "religions and State" which would guard the state's "secular nature." In this case "secular" signifies the familiar separation of church and state. But this vague definition, paired with the allowance of "emblematic and toponymic elements" of Quebec's cultural heritage like the cross on Mount Royal and the cross displayed within the National Assembly, only raises more questions. It seems certain religious symbols are permissible if they are seen to have important cultural importance, and this cultural importance trumps any latent threat the symbol poses to state neutrality. But surely the symbols worn by government personnel are culturally important. Are members of public bodies unable to act in a neutral manner simply because they wear a religious symbol? Furthermore, does the prohibition of the symbol really guarantee neutral conduct?

The charter gives rise to questions of this kind because it is full of terms like "religious neutrality" and "secular" that are never explicitly defined.[8] And this is not remarkable. Discourse concerning secularism is often characterized by a willingness to engage in dialogue and even embark on certain social and political agendas without recognizing the complexity of the subject matter, without even determining what the terms "secular" and "secularism" really signify.

This sort of indeterminacy is not peculiar to discourses concerning secularism. People are constantly forced to "take a stand" on particular issues and use particular terms without first establishing some consensus on what they really signify. This is all too easy, and to some extent unavoidable. Shared understandings seem elusive. But in this case both the charter's supporters and critics did not recognize establishing any common understanding as a priority. The many protest rallies provoked by the charter suggest that people of all faiths recognize this version of secularism as a common threat. However, the individuals who partook in these rallies undoubtedly conceptualize secularism differently.

[7] Bill 60, 13.
[8] Bill 60, 2.

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The Charter of Values has demonstrated how secularism is commonly utilized. The language of the charter suggests secularism is understood as a separation of the state and religion, but because the separation lacks a clear and comprehensive definition, secularism remains an inarticulate idea. Very few attempt to articulate secularism conceptually, and any specialized articulation does not seem to take root in common discourse. Instead, secularism is alluded to as an ideal that ought to be pursued or, on the other hand, an ideal that has led to some moral collapse or would threaten liberal freedoms. These allusions are instrumental. They are meant to further some immediate action that facilitates or impedes secularism, however it is understood.

So secularism is not commonly thought of in the abstract but in relation to what it entails or what it can "practically mean."[9] This resembles a pragmatic understanding originally described by William James, as opposed to an understanding of secularism in the abstract:

> To develop a thought's meaning, we need only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce: that conduct is for us its sole significance. And the tangible fact at the root of all our thought distinctions, however subtle, is that there is no one of them so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice. To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve—what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all.[10]

The pragmatist understands that conceptions are inseparable from their experienced effects. Moreover, because they are inseparable from experience, concepts take on a certain appearance by the way they fit with a "whole body of other truths already in our possession."[11]

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[9] William James, "What Pragmatism Means" in *Pragmatism and Other Writings,* edited by Giles Gunn (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 24.

[10] William James, "What Pragmatism Means", 25.

[11] William James, "Pragmatism's Conception of Truth" in *Pragmatism and Other Writings,* edited by Giles Gunn (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 93.

This explains the polarized reaction to the Charter of Values. Everyone is conceptualizing secularism in terms of its effects; the charter seems positive or negative, necessary or unnecessary and aggressive, by the way it relates to past experiences. For some the charter's pursuit of secularism through exclusionary measures appeared valid against a pre-existent outlook, while it appeared invalid against other pre-existing outlooks.

That is not to argue that supporters and critics of the charter possess radically different perspectives. Rather, reaction to the charter indicates that there are an inarticulate bunch of "truths" already in our collective possession. In response to the charter, there was no argument that the people of Quebec are not, in fact, citizens of "equal worth and dignity" who are "free to pursue rights and freedoms" when they come together to form a collective society.[12] The issue was whether the charter had identified a valid reason for restricting these freedoms. The freedoms themselves, and a corresponding sense of modern individuality, were assumptions or "truths" possessed by all parties. And the argument over the charter's legitimacy also brings to light a common conception regarding government; supporters and critics both recognized that society ought to be organized in a manner that does not clash with individual freedoms without good reason. Therefore, critics and proponents debate within a common liberal framework.

The Charter of Values has made two things clear. Secularism is not commonly imagined in the abstract, but pragmatically in terms of its effects. And impressions of secularism will vary at the individual level depending on one's pre-existing interpretation of a common liberal framework. The Charter of Values, and any abstract conceptualization of secularism are inescapably linked to this discursive context from which they originate, and one's orientation within this frame informs how secularism is conceived.

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[12] *Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms,* Éditeur Official du Quebec, updated November 1, 2014.
http://ww2.publicationsduquebec.gouv.qc.ca/dynamicSeach/telecharge.php?type=2&file=/C_12/C12_A.html

This thesis is not exclusively concerned with the Charter of Values, but it is one component of a larger argument. Rather, this thesis argues that Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* has a certain pragmatic value because it captures the contemporary secular context.

The following chapters neither offer a comprehensive summary of Taylor's remarkably long book nor do they offer a defence of Taylor's argument against possible critiques. Instead, this thesis demonstrates how *A Secular Age* clarifies contemporary discourses concerning secularism by capturing the framework in which they take place, and how this description of the framework undermines a widespread entrenchment that characterizes these discourses. These are described as two effects of Taylor's work. This thesis is undertaken in the same spirit of pragmatism originally described by William James because it is exclusively interested in effects. *A Secular Age* is pragmatically valuable, and this value has gone unappreciated.

Chapter 1 argues that this pragmatic value is partially due to Taylor's method, which differs from the mainstream approach to secularism. The latter treats secularism as a hypothesis to be proven or disproven in light of certain evidence. It begins with a working hypothesis regarding the place of religious institutions or the prevalence of religious beliefs in a particular context. This is taken as a particular secularization thesis, which is evaluated against observable data.

The mainstream approach is interested in clarifying and testing the kind of secularism implied by the Charter of Values. It articulates just what is meant by the separation of church and state, for example, and then determines if this separation is really operative in a given context.

For Taylor, the term secularism signifies certain conditions of lived experience in a context where belief in God is not unanimous and homogenous, but merely one possibility amongst many others. This plurality of outlooks entails that all kinds of belief, as well as myriad forms of unbelief, are "reflective" as opposed to the "naïve" belief that

characterized earlier stages of Western history.[13] One's worldview is held with the knowledge that oppositional views not only exist, but are vastly popular: "Naïveté is now unavailable to anyone, believer or unbeliever alike."[14]

Taylor is primarily concerned with displaying the phenomenological conditions that accompany the reflectiveness of the secular age. These are connected to a grand narrative explaining its origins:

> We have to understand the differences between these options not just in terms of creeds, but also in terms of differences of experience and sensibility. And on this latter level, we have to take account of two important differences: first, there is the massive change in the whole background of belief or unbelief, that is, the passing of the earlier "naïve" framework, and the rise of our "reflective" one. And secondly we have to be aware of how believers and unbelievers can experience their world very differently.[15]

Taylor's phenomenological argument requires a historical account of how the "North Atlantic World" moved from a naïve framework to a reflective framework, where many lead fulfilling lives without reference to anything that transcends the natural world.

The closing of the natural framework or "immanent frame" to the transcendent has its roots in a late medieval reform movement that sought to improve the religious life of the laity. This would inadvertently lead to a new kind of agency, which Taylor describes as the emergence of the "buffered" self.[16] And the newly conceived self leads to a newly imaged society; one understood as individuals coming together to further their "mutual benefit."[17]

The shared framework that became evident in the varied reactions to the Charter of Values is consistent with Taylor's immanent frame. Here society is imagined as a collective of buffered individuals who join together for their mutual benefit within a

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[13] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 14.

[14] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 21.

[15] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 14.

[16] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 27.

[17] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 171.

material world that is not grounded in anything beyond. This immanent frame works as a background to one's thinking, holding the modern individual captive, shaping experience and thoughts.[18]

Experiences are structured as either "open" or "closed" to transcendence depending on how the immanent frame is interpreted.[19] This is quite unlike the picture of modernity derived from various "subtraction" narratives. These see modernity as a constant moving away from the transcendent largely because advances in science provide a better "naturalistic" explanation of the world: "We are widely aware of living in a 'disenchanted' universe; and our use of this word bespeaks our sense that it was once enchanted. More, we are not only aware that it used to be so, but also that it was a struggle and an achievement to get to where we are; and that in some respects this achievement is fragile."[20]

The subtraction story is generally hostile to religious voices in the contemporary world because they threaten this historical achievement. Taylor's polemic against the subtraction story debunks this type of narrative and undermines a pervasive hostility towards those of a transcendent outlook.

The path to the immanent framework was not that simple. The buffered self and the society of mutual benefit were not simply there to be discovered after a fictional liberation from religious superstition; these had to be created through long and complex processes. Moreover, the secular age is not uniformly closed to transcendence. The immanent frame can be lived in without any transcendent component, but it also allows for appeals to transcendence. One's orientation in the immanent frame is reflective precisely because everyone is exposed to contrary interpretations of the frame, and no one orientation has proven itself uniquely capable of meeting modern moral demands that accompany societies of mutual benefit. Neither kind of outlook possesses legitimacy the other lacks.

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[18] Taylor, A Secular Age, 557.
[19] Taylor, A Secular Age, 550.
[20] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 26.

There are myriad outlooks within the immanent frame. Some are dissatisfied with key elements of the frame, like buffered individuality, while others are totally conducive to these background features. And oppositional interpretations of the immanent frame have become unavoidable. Within the immanent frame everyone is exposed, and to varying degrees pulled between, a plurality of perspectives that can be categorized as open or closed to transcendence. This is what Taylor refers to as "cross pressure."[21]

Chapter 2 demonstrates that open and closed readings of the immanent frame are driving popular discourse concerning secularism. The arguments of Karen Armstrong and Paul Kurtz are examples of open and closed readings of the immanent frame that have resonated with a wide audience. Key works from each are readily comparable for three reasons.

First, each constructs an ethical argument that corresponds with oppositional interpretation of the immanent frame. Armstrong attempts to re-popularize myth, or mythos, which is lost in modernity. The rediscovery of myth is imperative because encounters with the transcendent motivate interpersonal compassion that is sorely missed in the contemporary world. On the other hand, Kurtz offers some guiding principles that correspond with a purely immanent frame. His guiding principles are condensed in his term "Eupraxophy," which translates as good, practical, and wisdom.[22] These three qualities are imagined within a humanist perspective. Humanity has the innate capacity to determine what is good, practical and wise without appeals to anything transcendental. Moreover, these sorts of appeals are a superstitious threat to free inquiry.[23]

Secondly, although their outlooks are oppositional, the structure of each argument is remarkably similar. Both arguments depend on a biased historical argument, each simplified in order to support their pre-existent perspectives. These are referred to here as "selective histories" that serve as an origin story for an other

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[21] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 595.

[22] Paul Kurtz, *Eupraxophy: Living Without Religion* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1989), 14.

[23] Paul Kurtz, *In Defense of Secular Humanism* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1983), 14.

encountered in the contemporary world. Incidentally, this supports Taylor's argument that "our sense of where we are is crucially defined in part by a story of how we got there."[24]

Thirdly, Armstrong and Kurtz have attempted to actualize their respective arguments. Armstrong has developed the Charter for Compassion which promotes the transcendence of selfishness through the recognition of a deep interdependence and a commitment to compassion. The Charter for Compassion notably recognizes an "increase in the sum of human misery in the name of religion."[25] Kurtz broadcasted his secular humanist ideology through the Center for Inquiry, which seeks to end the privileged position and influence religion has in many societies.[26] The popularity of Armstrong's charter, and the continued growth of the Center for Inquiry are proof that these respective arguments represent popular sentiments within the immanent frame.

It may seem that these two agendas overlap because they are both vaguely critical of religion, but this is not the case. Kurtz is hostile to religious beliefs, which are crudely grouped together as a "transcendental temptation."[27] However, Armstrong is critical of an intellectualized modern religion fixated on "the modern God—conceived as powerful creator, first cause, supernatural personality realistically understood and rationally demonstrable."[28] Armstrong is very much in favour of reviving religion in what she argues is its true form, the habitual practice of compassion. She considers this understanding of religion to be largely lost in modernity, which saw religion becoming increasingly a matter of intellectual assent:

> Above all, the habitual practice of compassion and the Golden Rule "all day and every day" demands perpetual *kenosis*. The constant "stepping outside" of our own preferences, convictions, and prejudices is an *ekstasis* that is not a glamorous rapture but, as Confucius's pupil Yan Hui explained, is itself the transcendence we seek. The effect of these

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[24] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 29.

[25] Karen Armstrong, "Sign and Share the Charter for Compassion," http://charterforcompassion.org/the-charter.

[26] "About the Center for Inquiry," last updated 2013, http://www.centerforinquiry.net/about.

[27] Paul Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation: A Critique of Religion and the Paranormal* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1986).

[28] Karen Armstrong, *A Case for God* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2010), 278.

practices cannot give us concrete information about God; it is certainly not a scientific "proof."[29]

It is crucial to read both Armstrong and Kurtz through Taylor's immanent frame in order to appreciate the obvious conflict between the two agendas. Kurtz is only satisfied with a purely immanent frame. Liberation from transcendent superstition allows the modern individual to rationally cohere to the modern moral order of mutual benefit. Any invocation of the transcendent as a moral source is dismissible as superstitious. Conversely, Armstrong attempts to deconstruct the modern "buffered" individual and re-discover compassion through myth. Religion, in her sense of the term, is a crucial moral source that both she and Taylor find lacking at present:

> Embodied feeling is no longer a medium in which we relate to what we recognize as rightly bearing an aura of the higher; either we do recognize something like this, and we see reason as our unique access to it; or we tend to reject this kind of higher altogether, reducing it through naturalistic explanation.[30]

Both agendas are informed by oppositional reactions to the buffered self and the modern moral order of mutual benefit. By articulating the definitive background ideas of the secular framework, Taylor has identified the sources of conflict. As a result, even apparently unrelated arguments become appreciable as structurally opposed.

Chapter 3 demonstrates how this new clarity undermines the entrenchment demonstrated by Armstrong and Kurtz, and how it must lead to direct dialectic engagement that is free from negative preconceptions. This kind of dialogue is only possible after the kind of entrenchment exemplified in Armstrong and Kurtz's arguments are overcome.

Overcoming preconceptions is a matter of understanding how entrenchment originates within the immanent frame. Opposite reactions to the buffered self and the morality of mutual benefit, two definitive features of the immanent frame, are ultimately driving entrenched discourse. But recognizing the structural origin of entrenchment

[29] Karen Armstrong, *A Case for God*, 328.
[30] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 288.

inevitably leads to a re-consideration of other previously negated perspectives within the immanent frame and those that embody them.

Here Taylor's articulation of cross pressure is instrumental in overcoming the sort of entrenchment exposed in chapter 2. It illustrates why entrenched perspectives must misrepresent an other as a defence mechanism against cross pressure; if the other is fundamentally flawed, his contrary worldview need not be accepted as a genuine alternative to one's own. This is a subtle form of protection from the inescapability of cross pressure. Yet cross pressure is all the more inescapable once it is clear that neither the closed nor open interpretations of the immanent frame is better suited to fulfilling shared normative expectations. Recognition of cross pressure as a categorical feature of modern life undermines one's ability to wholly negate other orientations within the immanent frame.

This thesis presents two effects of Taylor's argument. The first has been described as the "clarifying effect." Although many arguments regarding the place and propriety of religion in the modern world may seem numerous and at times unrelated, they are inevitably reactions to universal background features of the contemporary outlook. Once it is clear that seemingly unrelated polemics are reacting to the same features of a shared outlook, they become structurally relatable. Even if there is no direct dialogue between two parties, as was the case with Armstrong and Kurtz, one gains "insight into the way two people or groups can be arguing past each other, because their experience and thought are structured by two different pictures."[31]

Taylor's argument also undermines entrenchment that characterizes discourse. This is the second effect. Once the sources of conflict are clear and cross pressure is recognized as inescapable, entrenchment against transcendence or a "flat" world closed to transcendence is unsustainable. Of course people will still find reasons for their view of the frame, but these will not depend on, or excuse, the dismissal of an other.

The Charter of Values ought to be reconsidered after these effects are made clear. In light of the immanent frame, it becomes obvious that the charter is arguing that

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[31] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 557.

people of a transcendental orientation are incompatible with the secular state. It also becomes clear that the neutrality described in the charter is not really neutral, but is totally immanent. The charter is hostile to a large number of the population because it assumes the transcendental outlook is either inherently contrary to, or unnecessary to, the functioning of an immanent state.

Chapter 1.

The Immanent Frame and its Origins

Arguing that *A Secular Age* has a certain pragmatic value implies that it is unique in this respect amongst other works concerning secularism. So what distinguishes Taylor's approach to the subject, and why is it useful?

The first section of this chapter offers a brief history of secularization theory in order to define a mainstream methodological approach to the subject. This cursory glance at the history of the secularization theory reveals that it began as a general assumption shared by many founders of the social sciences, which was then challenged by subsequent commentators and by widespread evidence that suggested a global religious resurgence.

Secularization has transformed from a relatively simple assumption regarding modernity to a concept without a universally accepted definition. Yet despite the lack of consensus, there remains a mainstream method to its study.

The mainstream approach begins with a working hypothesis concerning the state of religious institutions or the presence and place of religious belief in a given context. This is taken as a particular articulation of the secularization thesis. The thesis is then evaluated against various social data to determine if it holds true or if it must be changed to fit with the observed data.

A Secular Age is quite unlike the mainstream approach. Taylor's work begins not with a particular hypothesis, but a simple question: "What does it mean to say that we live in a secular age?"[32] Here the word "secular" does not signify a general diminution of

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[32] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 1.

religious practice or the separation of social institutions from religious institutions. Instead, the term points to certain "conditions of belief" and "lived experience" in a context where belief in God is one option among others, and "frequently not the easiest to embrace."[33]

For Taylor, lived experience is made up of two constituent parts that require analysis. First, there is a subjective sense of fullness: "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 worth while, more admirable, more what it should be."[34] And this sense of fullness, and all experience for that matter, is interpreted through a framework or "background" picture that remains tacit and unacknowledged by the agent.[35]

Providing a full account of life in this secular age requires a historical account of how the West, or the "North Atlantic World," has shifted from a "naïve" framework, one where the existence of God was obvious to people living "naively within a theistic construal," to a "reflective" framework where fullness can be understood without reference to God:

> The shift in background, or better the disruption of the earlier background comes best to light when we focus on certain distinctions we make today; for instance, that between the immanent and the transcendent, the natural and the supernatural. Everyone understands these, both those who affirm and those who deny the second term of each pair. This hiving off of an independent, free-standing level, that of "nature", which may or may not be in interaction with something further or beyond, is a crucial bit of modern theorizing, which in turn corresponds to a constitutive dimension of modern experience.[36]

The answer to Taylor's initial question is provided through a comprehensive exposition of this contemporary immanent frame and the kinds of fullness that are

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[33] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 3.
[34] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 5.
[35] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 13.
[36] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 14.

possible within it. Taylor is primarily interested in the phenomenological conditions that make up this secular age, which are inescapably connected to a "grand narrative" that explains the origin of this background picture.

The second and third sections of this chapter summarize two key features of Taylor's narrative. The enclosure of the natural or immanent framework against the transcendent begins with a late medieval reform movement that sought to elevate and perfect the religious life of the laity. Eventually this transforms agency itself, leading to the emergence of the "buffered" self within a disenchanted world.[37] This new conceptualization of the self informs modern social theory that will articulate, for the first time, a society not grounded in the transcendent, but one conceived as a coming together of individuals for their "mutual benefit."[38]

Together, the buffered individual and the modern moral order of mutual benefit lead to the rise of "Providential Deism" where God is imagined as a distant and uninvolved designer.[39] This transformation fit the constraints of the disenchanted modern society. Now, like society, the cosmos itself was devoid of God's immediate presence. This distancing would eventually allow for the emergence of a totally immanent frame, where, for the first time, it was possible to ground one's ethics, view of nature, and one's sense of "fullness" within a frame that does not necessarily involve any appeal to the transcendent.

The summary provided in this chapter will not address many important sections of Taylor's narrative due to the spatial constraints of this argument. This restrained summary aims to trace the emergence of the buffered self and societies of mutual benefit, two background ideas that dominate life within the immanent frame and influence discourse on religion today.

The final section of this chapter outlines the immanent frame at the close of Taylor's narrative, where society is grounded in secular time and a materialistic universe,

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[37] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 27.

[38] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 171.

[39] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 19.

and is inhabited by buffered individuals who join together for their mutual benefit. Furthermore, this immanent frame can be lived in with or without appeals to anything transcendental.

This last point concerning the plurality of orientations is skewed by "subtraction stories" that see modern secularity as a liberation from "confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge."[40] These erroneous narratives inform misinterpretations of the immanent frame that perceive transcendentally framed lives as illusory and flawed.

When properly understood, life in the immanent frame is reflective precisely because, to varying degrees, all individuals are exposed to contrary interpretations of the background; some frame their existence in relation to something transcendental while others frame their existence entirely within the immanent, and neither orientation has proven itself more capable of meeting modern moral demands. In fact, both outlooks struggle to achieve modern normative expectations. Therefore, neither is more legitimate than the other.

This is where *A Secular Age* takes on a unique pragmatic value. Taylor demonstrates two background concepts that have altered categorical conditions of belief, and inform a discursive environment marked by entrenchment. Applying Taylor's argument would help those living within the immanent frame to overcome obstacles to dialectic engagement.

1.1. Taylor and Mainstream Secularization Thesis

In general terms, the concept of secularization begins as an assumption that modernity is incompatible with religion, and that religious beliefs and institutions will fade from modern life with the passage of time. This assumption was shared by most of the

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[40] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 22.

founders of modern social sciences, who imply it as an unstated premise in many of their theories.[41]

Jose Casanova's seminal publication, *Modern Religions in the Public World,* includes the best genealogical account of the secularization thesis, which, at its core, is a matter of differentiation:

> The core and the central thesis of the theory of secularization is the conceptualization of the process of societal modernization as a process of functional differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres— primarily the state, the economy, and science—from the religious sphere and its concomitant differentiation and specialization of religion within its own newly found religious sphere.[42]

Differentiation implies two different fates for modern religion. First, with modern society split into secular and religious spheres, religion becomes an increasingly private matter. The second and more extreme outcome builds upon the privatization thesis, but also predicts that religion will eventually atrophy even within the private sphere, as it continues to fade from other areas of modern life.[43]

This paradigmatic assumption remained unchallenged for some time. One of the earliest objections to the secularization thesis is found in David Martin's argument that the secularization thesis is actually a large number of separate elements bound together in an "intellectual hold all" that tends to oversimplify an immensely complicated subject in the interests of an ideological view of history.[44] Subsequent eruptions of religion into the public sphere throughout the world, particularly from the late 1980s onwards, eliminated any naïve confidence in secularization as a necessary outcome of modernity.[45]

So the secularization thesis began as an inarticulate assumption, which was critiqued as such by a subsequent generation of commentators, and was challenged

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[41] Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 17.

[42] Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 19.

[43] Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World,* 20.

[44] David Martin, *The Religious and the Secular* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1969), 2-3.

[45] Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 19.

once again by a religious resurgence that contradicted the differentiation thesis. What was once accepted as an inevitable consequence of modernity has become a very complex and contested subject.

This complication of the subject and emergence of contrary evidence does not suggest that the secularization thesis has been entirely invalidated. To varying degrees the political structures of the western world do function without appeals to any religious tradition. In fact, a government's legitimacy depends on the maintenance of state neutrality. Additionally, some maintain that differentiation establishes a society that functions without appeals to any religious grounding, which causes a decline in the overall number of "religious people."[46] Nevertheless, it has become impossible to assume that secularization is a necessary and categorical outcome of modernity.[47]

Although secularization has become complicated, approaches to its study are remarkably homogenous. Most publications concerning secularization attempt to demonstrate how it is or is not taking place in some particular context. In other words, secularization is typically treated as a hypothesis that must be weighed against some evidence.

This mainstream method begins with a clarification of the hypothesis, or what is signified by secularization. The validity of the hypothesis is then weighed against various data. Regardless of how it is conceived, and whether the hypothesis is confirmed or disproven, secularization is treated as a social phenomenon. As such, it becomes a subject dominated by sociologists.

A Secular Age differs from this mainstream approach from its outset. Rather than treating secularization as a hypothesis to be tested and clarified, Taylor aims to expose phenomenological conditions that define a secular age. This is a complete departure from the mainstream, and the only work on secularization that adequately investigates what it really means to live in a secular age.

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[46] Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1-2.

[47] David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1978), 3.

Taylor certainly recognizes that both differentiation and a general decrease of religious belief and practice are features of Western modernity. However, these effects alone do not capture experiences within a secular context. For Taylor, "secularity" is defined by new conditions of belief that result from a shift in the entire context of understanding:

> 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.[48]

This pre-ontological picture is shared. It is operative within a common "social imaginary" which serves as the background that gives a shared sense to particular images, stories, and social practices.[49] The sense generated from the social imaginary is often implicit and inarticulate, so it is difficult to discern when a particular aspect of the background picture gives sense to a particular practice. Instead, individuals draw from their inarticulate background understanding in its entirety, "that is, our sense of our whole predicament in time and space, among others and in history."[50]

A fundamental transformation of the shared background picture has resulted in new conditions of belief. More precisely, this transformation is the move from an enchanted imaginary where naïve belief is the only popular option to the modern imaginary where, for the first time, exclusive humanism becomes a recognizable option. Within this altered imaginary various forms of belief as well as unbelief will eventually become real options for many. This alteration would end the era of naïve belief and usher in an age of reflective belief.

Taylor's argument concerns the contemporary phenomenological conditions that make up this secular age, but these are the result of very long and nuanced historical

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[48] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 3.
[49] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 171-172.
[50] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 174.

processes. Before the phenomenological conditions of the immanent frame can be explained, Taylor must provide a historical component to his argument by recounting the long march from the naïve to the reflective age.

This is the difference between *A Secular Age* and the mainstream approach. Rather than conducting research in order to evaluate a given hypothesis, Taylor must develop a grand narrative that charts this background transformation, and exposes the effects of this background picture.

Differentiating Taylor's method from the mainstream is not meant to denigrate the latter. In fact, the two approaches are complimentary. The more conventional method is able to reveal what *A Secular Age* does not. Taylor does not consider relevant social data related to processes of secularization.

On the other hand, the mainstream approach is unable to investigate the significance of the observed data. For example, it might very well be the case that less people regularly attend a weekly congregation. But how is this significant and what does it entail? The mainstream approach may imply changes in lived experience, but it utterly fails at exposing these changes qualitatively. It fails to consider how religious outlooks have changed during this apparent decline in attendance, or how this decline affects discourse between those still attending and society at large. In other words, how this particular decline affects life in a secular context.

This is precisely what makes *A Secular Age* unique. Taylor's method enables a qualitative investigation of lived experience within a secular framework.

1.2. Disenchantment and the Buffered Self

The most fundamental feature of this framework originates in a late medieval reform movement that sought to remake society. This movement was dissatisfied with the "hierarchical equilibrium" between the lay and renunciative vocations, and began to

demand more of the lay individual.[51] The drive to reform begins a series of transformations that cause the emergence of modern agency and a corresponding disenchantment of the world.

At the outset of the reform movement life within Latin Christendom was marked by a naïve belief, as there were no commonly available perspectives that contradicted the existence of God.[52] At the time these were simply unimaginable.

Taylor points to three general features of life in Latin Christendom that made God's existence unquestionable. First, the natural world demonstrated divine purpose and action, and was imagined within its proper place in the cosmos; the apparent natural order in the world suggested divine creation and great events were taken as the will of God.[53]

Secondly, God was always implicated in the existence of society. A kingdom could only be conceived as grounded in something beyond mundane human action, and social life was interwoven with frequent collective rituals so that "one could not but encounter God everywhere."[54]

Thirdly, people imagined their world as "enchanted."[55] This world abounded with spirits, both good and bad, and powers resided in charged objects like relics and special items endowed with sacramental power.[56] This is totally unlike the current view of the material world which, for the most part, is full of ordinary objects within a natural environment.

Here it is imperative to recognize an important feature of the enchanted world; it possessed its own meanings and powers that were perceived as exterior to the human mind. The rigid boundary separating agents and the environment that is taken for granted today is unimaginable in the enchanted world. The modern individual looks out

[51] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 61.
[52] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 27.
[53] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 25.
[54] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 25.
[55] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 26.
[56] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 32.

at the world from within and finds or imposes meaning on certain objects and events. Conversely, one is susceptible to a variety of powers residing throughout the enchanted world, whether in the form of spirits, charged objects, or divine events.[57] At that time there was no clear boundary between the self and the world that seems an inescapable feature of modern life:

> Once meanings are not exclusively in the mind, once we can fall under the spell, enter the zone of power of exogenous meaning, then we think of this meaning as including us, or perhaps penetrating us. We are in as it were a kind of space defined by this influence. The meaning can no longer be placed simply within; but nor can it be located exclusively without. Rather it is in a kind of interspace which straddles what for us is a clear boundary. Or the boundary is, in an image I want to use here, porous.[58]

In such an enchanted world, where the boundaries between self and the external are porous, and religious rituals hold society together, there is an overwhelming push to conform to orthodoxy. It is only after a closing of the self to this "interspace" between the individual and the enchanted world that alternatives to orthodoxy become imaginable. This was the initial shift that undermined the era of naïve belief, and it was the unintended consequence of the late medieval reform movement that aimed to improve the religious life of the laity.

The reform movement's goal was incompatible with the pre-existing social configuration within Latin Christendom as it emerged from the early middle ages. The status quo involved a two-tiered approach to religious obligation. A small section of the population lived a sequestered life in order to practice highly demanding forms of devotion, while the laity's participation in religious rituals was relatively perfunctory.[59] The relationship between the two groups exemplified the hierarchical complementarity at play in Latin Christendom, epitomized by the unequal yet mutually dependent orders of

[57] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 33.
[58] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 35.
[59] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 62.

medieval society; the clergy prays for all, while the nobility defends and the peasant labours.[60]

The higher and the worldly accepted different religious obligations:

One important divergence lay on one hand between a faith in which the doctrinal element was more developed, and in which devotional life took to some degree the form of inner prayer, and later even meditative practices; contrasted on the other to a faith where the belief content was very rudimentary, and devotional practice was largely a matter of what one did.[61]

And this suited Latin Christendom because many of the Christianized peoples of Europe had been converted through some decision of their leaders. Even subsequent generations were bound to harbor an understanding of particular rites that differed from the exact clerical understanding.[62] At the time their participation in ritual was taken as adequate.

But the social landscape inevitably changes, and these changes tended to individuate communities and disrupt the complimentary equilibrium of early medieval society. One important change was the breaking up of traditional village life as many migrated to live in emerging towns. This entailed a new social and economic mobility enjoyed by those who staffed new institutions of law and commerce.[63]

Another push towards individualism came from clerical elites who sought to raise the level of lay religious practice. Taylor identifies the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 as the beginning of the church's concerted effort to foster a sense of personal responsibility within the laity by making auricular confession an annual requirement.[64]

The reform movement was caused by myriad social, economic and intellectual changes, all of which inform a newly imagined religious life. This was a movement away

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[60] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 45.

[61] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 63.

[62] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 63.

[63] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 68.

[64] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 64.

from a religion of hierarchical complementarity, where a designated few practice a strict version of the faith, to a religion of personal responsibility, where each member of society is increasingly involved and responsible.

The new sense of individual responsibility is clearly demonstrated by a widespread shift in the interpretation of death. Earlier views of death involved pre-existing pagan traditions that depict death as a "reduced stage" of existence after life.[65] The new interpretation supplanted this pagan view with an increasingly Christian view of death. Now there was a new reason to fear it, as one's admittance to an eschatological transformation after death depended on one's response to the call of the gospel in life.[66]

This begins to individuate the pre-modern self because the individual must take particular care and responsibility for his very own salvation. This personal responsibility was amplified as the church gave currency to the idea of a personal judgment upon death in the later middle ages.[67] The new understanding of death also leads to a new mode of social interaction and bonding between individuals, in this case the living and the dead in purgatory. The dead come to depend on the living to intercede on their behalf through prayer or the payment of indulgences.[68]

The very push to bring the laity up to speed with the clerical elite resulted in the rise of a new elite who found new common practices and fervor unpalatable for various reasons. The new elites were also inclined towards individualism, but they were far more concerned with inward contemplation and prayer, while popular religion remained a matter of ritual practice.[69]

The new elite is critical of popular practices that are seen as mindless diversions from genuine piety, and this critique of ritual is inescapably a threat to the enchanted world itself. The clearest example of this is found in Erasmus, who sees the right inner

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[65] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 66.
[66] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 67.
[67] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 67.
[68] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 69.
[69] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 71.

attitude and intention that motivates piety as far more important than a pious act itself.[70] For example, a pilgrimage to a particular shrine can aid the pilgrim, but it is not as important as developing a real appreciation of a saint's life and actions, which should be internalized and emulated. The magic associated with the relic becomes at best a secondary concern, and at worst a distraction.

The new elite critique resembles pre-existing popular concerns espoused by the Waldensians and Lollards, who were troubled by the use of sacrament for worldly ends.[71] Not only was "church magic" seen as a distraction from true piety, it was a blasphemous attempt to control and divert the power of God.[72]

But one could not simply stop magic rituals, because the enchanted world remained a very threatening place. The only solution is a leap out of the enchanted world altogether. This was a matter of having faith that the ultimate power of God will triumph over all evil magic.[73] Faith of this kind respects the omnipotence of God while providing a sense of security from the many threatening forces encountered in the enchanted world.

It also begins to rob the enchanted world of its power; negative spirits and forces encountered in the world do not seem so menacing when one has cultivated a strong confidence in God's salvation. From here it is not long until the doctrine of salvation through God's grace alone re-arranges the centers of religious life completely. Now God's power is seen as diffused through ordinary life because it cannot be wholly contained in sacraments or sacred places.[74]

The stage is set for the Protestant Reformation, which is a known "engine of disenchantment," but a movement that must be seen within a larger and older push for reform.[75] The reformation is unique because it involves a clearer drive towards

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[70] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 72.

[71] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 72.

[72] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 73.

[73] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 73-74.

[74] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 79.

[75] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 77.

individualism and disenchantment displayed by elites like Erasmus. Reformers are not content to criticize popular piety and the enchanted world from afar. Instead, they embark on a project of remaking a disenchanted and disciplined society:

> This now changes the centre of gravity of the religious life. The power of God doesn't operate through various "sacramental", 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. But in another way, the channels are radically narrowed, because this sanctification depends entirely now on our inner transformation, our throwing ourselves on God's mercy in faith. Otherwise nothing works, and we create no valid order.[76]

1.3. The Modern Moral Order

The enchanted societies of pre-modernity are challenged and disrupted by the newly imagined buffered self. This was a precondition for the emergence of modern social theories that correspond with this new individuality. These reimagine society as a group of individuals coming together with certain ends in view.[77]

These ends are clearly the product of the disenchanting reform movement that culminates in the reorganization of societies by reformers who no longer fear a world full of charged meaning and spirits. God alone was responsible for one's ultimate salvation, and the church's magic was increasingly seen as an affront to God's omnipotent power, which cannot be controlled by humans.

The disenchanted society provides the context in which a new social theory takes hold. The modern moral order of mutual benefit conceptualizes political society as an instrument enabling the individual to pursue the ends of "ordinary" life by providing security, exchange and prosperity.[78]

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[76] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 79.
[77] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 159.
[78] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 170.

The historical emergence of modern societies is a matter of the theory of mutual benefit penetrating and transforming the common social imaginary, which results in an objectified economy, the creation of a public sphere, and practices of democratic self rule.[79] These three features of the society of mutual benefit are interlocking and all correspond with the individual as an atomized agent living in a disenchanted environment.

Within this society new processes of exchange are related to a providential design of humans, who are meant to live together for their mutual benefit.[80] The buffered individual applies himself in his ordinary work and seeks his own economic ends with confidence that this will result in a greater societal prosperity.[81] Consequently, the economy becomes objectified as system of interlocking activities of production, exchange and consumption with its own laws: "There are agents, individuals acting on their own behalf, but the global upshot happens behind their backs. It has a certain predictable form, because there are certain laws governing the way in which their myriad individual actions concatenate."[82]

This newly imagined economy involves a co-operation or "exchange of reciprocal obligations" that is unhooked from the polity.[83] The emergence of the objectified economy is closely linked with the emergence of an apolitical public sphere, where these individuals imagine themselves coming together to form public opinion through various mediums of communication that constitute a "metatopical" discursive space:

> Common space arising from assembly in some locale is what I want to call "topical common space." But the public sphere is something different. It transcends such topical spaces. We might say that it knits together a plurality of such spaces into one larger space of nonassembly. The same public discussion is deemed to pass through our debate today, and someone else's earnest conversation tomorrow, and the newspaper

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[79] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 176.

[80] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 177.

[81] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 177.

[82] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 181.

[83] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 177-178.

interview Thursday, and so on. I call this larger kind of nonlocal common space "metatopical."[84]

Not only was this new public sphere imagined as independent from the governing body, it was also a new space where the legitimacy of government was evaluated. Political society is increasingly seen as an instrument for something pre-political, principally the flourishing of individuals who opt to form societies for their mutual benefit.[85]

Now there are both extra-political purposes and extra-political spaces from which people can evaluate the polity, and this is the last major shift that completes the modern social imaginary. The modern economy and the public sphere enfranchise buffered individuals, who form a collective agency through dialogue with others. Eventually, and through varied historical processes, this new collective is established as the sovereign power in representational governments.

The emergence of the objectified economy, the public sphere, and the people as the sovereign power are transformations that go hand in hand with a change to the metaphysical outlook. The newly imagined public sphere, for example, is nothing more than individuals situated in an extra-political and metatopical space. This is quite unlike association in pre-modern societies, which were inescapably grounded in some divine meaning and purpose that transcended profane matters in profane time:

> It seems to have been the universal norm to see the important meta-topical spaces and agencies as constituted in some mode of higher time. States and churches were seen to exist almost necessarily in more than one time dimension, as though it were inconceivable that they have their being purely in the profane or ordinary time. A state that bodied forth the Great Chain was connected to the eternal realm of Ideas; a people defined by its law communicated with the founding time where this was laid down; and so on.[86]

This alteration in the social background motivates the development of an elite view of God that corresponds with the modern moral order of mutual benefit. Until this

[84] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 187.

[85] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 188.

[86] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 195.

point in history God's purposes were recognized as both mysterious and involving something beyond immediate human flourishing, but this changes. Now modern society is seen to function because it is orchestrated to correspond with God's providential design of humanity. This implies a radical narrowing of God's plan, whose "goals for us shrink to the single end of our encompassing this order of mutual benefit he has designed for us."[87] This is the "anthropocentric shift" which allows for the development of exclusive humanism; now it is possible to identify one's highest moral capacity, or "fullness," without reference to anything beyond ordinary human flourishing in secular time.[88]

At this point in his narrative, Taylor's rebuke against subtraction stories becomes clearer. These subtraction stories vary, but insist that "ordinary human desires" are all that remain after liberation from "false mythologies."[89] It was only a matter of liberating the modern world-view from the perverse and the illusory, so that humans could unite in societies that have no normative principles but those of the modern moral order.[90] Taylor proves this view of history fails to appreciate that this new framework was not simply there to be discovered once illusions were done away with. It had to be created through long and complex historical processes.

1.4. The Immanent Frame

Taylor identifies the establishment of the disciplined rational order of mutual benefit as the "heartland and origin" of the contemporary predicament: "That is, of the new conditions in which belief and unbelief uneasily coexist, and often struggle with each other in contemporary society."[91] In light of this assessment, perhaps this is an ideal place to leave Taylor's narrative in order to summarize his depiction of the contemporary secular framework, or immanent frame.

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[87] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 221.
[88] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 221.
[89] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 253.
[90] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 294.
[91] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 295.

By this point the general structure of modern experience begins to resemble contemporary experience, where all are constrained within the interlocking cosmic, social, and moral orders that make up the immanent frame.[92] The central features of this framework are the buffered self and the corresponding society of mutual benefit, which is situated in secular time. This frame constitutes a self-sufficient immanent world against a possible transcendent one.[93]

Taylor's polemic against the subtraction narrative extends into his description of the immanent frame. If true, subtraction accounts of modernity would render belief invalid. However, the modern imaginary has not become uniformly hostile towards belief. Instead, the long march to secularity has taken us from a context of naïve belief to one where belief and unbelief are necessarily reflective.

Many live without imagining anything beyond the immanent frame. This has become an increasingly popular option throughout modernity as exclusive humanisms have moved from intellectual niches into the popular imaginary, and the deist view of the cosmos has been challenged by nineteenth century developments in science that suggest an indifferent and hostile universe.[94]

However, this trend does not imply that the only correct interpretation of the immanent frame is one that is entirely closed to transcendence, and that anyone who adheres to something beyond immanence is somehow defective. Rather than steadily diminishing, what could be called the spiritual aspect of existence has not declined uniformly, but has continually transformed to fit with changes brought on by modernity.

Transformations have produced a pluralistic context where interpretations of the immanent frame vary. While everyone is confronted with the definitive features of the immanent frame, reactions to them are continuously changing. Although they are rarely the objects of explicit consideration, the buffered self and the modern moral order of

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[92] Jose Casanova, "A Secular Age: Dawn or Twilight?" in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, edited by Michael Warner, Jonathan Vanantwerpen and Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), 265.

[93] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 542.

[94] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 295.

mutual benefit are ubiquitous, and provoke myriad reactions. Just as they led to the emergence of exclusive humanism, they continue to provoke "an ever-widening variety of moral/spiritual options" referred to as the ongoing "Nova Effect."[95]

So there are myriad outlooks within the immanent frame, some of which challenge the social ordering that corresponds to modern individuality while others are totally conducive to the background features of modernity. Whatever one's orientation, it is impossible to avoid oppositional interpretations of the immanent frame. Taylor refers to this aspect of contemporary experience as "cross pressure."[96]

Some feel cross pressure only periodically through encounters with a contradictory vision of the frame. The fact that such an alien perspective is a live option for others gives pause for consideration, even if this other view is eventually dismissed as unpalatable or misguided. Despite the dismissal, one's own orientation within the immanent frame is challenged by the mere awareness of contrary outlooks.

For others cross pressure is acute and inescapable. Taylor alludes to the life and works of William James as an example of this type of awareness. James captured the experience of religious transformation, and was pulled back and forth between belief and disbelief in his own life.[97] He stood exposed in a middle ground between immanence and transcendence, an open space where one feels the pull in both directions. This is the middle point of cross pressures that define contemporary culture.[98]

Cross pressure is a universal feature of modern life, though the qualitative experiences of cross pressure are varied. Clearly secular societies are not characterized by a steady and uniform decline of religious faith. Rather, these societies are characterized by a plurality of outlooks, both immanent and transcendent.

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[95] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 299.

[96] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 595.

[97] Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 60.

[98] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 592.

At the same time, the immanent frame is characterized by a set of mainstream normative expectations corresponding to buffered individuality. These begin to challenge hierarchic complementarity early on in societies of mutual benefit:

> We can say that (1) the order of mutual benefit holds between individuals (or at least moral agents who are independent of larger hierarchical orders); (2) the benefits crucially include life and the means to life, although securing these relates to the practice of virtue; and (3) the order is meant to secure freedom and easily finds expression in terms of rights. To these we can add a fourth point… These rights, this freedom, this mutual benefit, is to be secured to all participants equally.[99]

It is worth mentioning some exceptional outlooks generated as a backlash to the modern moral order, which safeguards and affirms ordinary life. One such outlook is the anti-humanism epitomized in the writings of Nietzsche, whom Taylor explains as a rebel against a perceived emptiness within societies of mutual benefit. Rather than affirming the ordinary goals of society, the anti-humanist is prepared to sacrifice the ordinary if it impedes the will to power: "It wants to rehabilitate destruction and chaos, the infliction of suffering and exploitation, as part of the life to be affirmed."[100] However, anti-humanism of this sort is a very exceptional sort of outlook. Nearly all of those inhabiting the cross pressured frame seek to fulfill the modern moral order of mutual benefit.

So the immanent frame is both confining and flexible. The modern individual is compelled to conform to universal normative expectations. Yet, at the same time, he finds his own motivation or moral source, either immanent or transcendent, which motivates his moral conformity and enables people of differing outlooks to achieve "overlapping consensus."[101]

One's sense of dignity as a rational agent serves as a purely immanent moral source. The buffered individual has the capacity to achieve a universal perspective, in this case to discover a categorical morality, and so he ought to act according to

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[99] Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004)*,* 21-22.
[100] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 373.
[101] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 693.

categorical maxims.[102] In this case it is imperative to live up to one's inherent dignity as a rational agent.

Finding a transcendent moral source within an immanent picture can be relatively difficult, but "embodied feeling" can still open experience to something higher.[103] In this case the individual is motivated not through appeals to universal maxims understood rationally, but strong sensations that provoke action "through the guts."[104]

These two moral sources further indicate the extent to which the modern moral order dominates the immanent frame. One's dignity as a rational agent motivates rational inquiry, through which universally binding laws that respect all individuals become known. On the other hand, deep sensibilities tamper with the rigid boundaries that insulate modern individuals. In the depths of vivid experiences, the modern individual's buffer collapses, and he still "loses himself." Yet the normative expectations of mutual benefit are still in effect regardless of one's moral source. Well-reasoned actions and deep sensibilities are intolerable if they result in infringement upon the rights of individuals expressed in the modern moral order.

Despite an apparently universal aversion to violence, it is constantly reappearing, and this fact indicates an important and final point concerning cross pressure. In the attempt to live up to strong commitments to mutual benefit, neither the transcendental, nor the purely immanent perspective clearly possesses answers that the other lacks.[105] All struggle to fulfill the same normative expectations. Therefore, life in the immanent frame is all the more cross pressured between a plurality of oppositional perspectives, none of which are clearly better equipped to meet normative expectations. When understood properly, the immanent frame is open to an immanent or transcendent reading, while compelling us to neither.[106]

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[102] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 694.

[103] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 288.

[104] Taylor uses this phrase to differentiate agape from modern objectified moral laws in *A Secular Age,* 741.

[105] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 726.

[106] Taylor, *A Secular Age* 550*.*

Yet cross pressure is often obscured by "spin": "a way of convincing oneself that one's reading is obvious, compelling, allowing of no cavil or demurral."[107] And when the validity of one's outlook becomes definite and obvious, those who disagree with some aspect of it become flawed, less worthy of serious consideration. One of the most powerful spins in effect today blends a common understanding of modern science with a subtraction story. The result is a popular interpretation of the immanent frame as closed to transcendence.

Here modern science is perceived as a push to establish materialism. Various religions and spiritualties only remain popular because many lack the courage or intelligence to face certain hard aspects of life in a materialist reality.[108] Scientific findings have challenged the pre-modern hierarchic cosmos.[109] But this merely entails that scientific observations have been incompatible with an enchanted world, not necessarily the existence of something transcendent.

The assessment of the transcendentally inclined as cowardly or misguided depends on an erroneous coming of age narrative that sees Western societies moving from childhood to adulthood.[110] The popularity of this narrative has little to do with any particular scientific observation. It is widely held because the scientific endeavor itself corresponds with the buffered individuality originating in the late medieval reform movement and emerging in disenchanted societies:

> Characteristic of this picture are a series of priority relations. Knowledge of the self and its states comes before knowledge of external reality and of others. The knowledge of reality as neutral fact comes before our attributing to it various "values" and relevances. And, of course, knowledge of the things of "this world", of the natural order precedes any theoretical invocation of forces and realities transcendent to it… The priority relations tell us not only what is learned before what. They are foundational relations. I know the world through my representations. I must grasp the world as fact before I can posit values. I must accede to the transcendent, if at all, by inference from the natural… it is obvious that

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[107] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 551.
[108] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 561.
[109] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 566.
[110] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 589.

the inference to the transcendent is at the extreme and most fragile end of a chain of inferences; it is the most epistemically questionable.[111]

Taylor is not arguing that scientifically based arguments for atheism are invalid. Rather, such arguments are popularly perceived as obvious because they appeal to modern individuality operating in the immanent frame.[112] This pervasive sense of individuality can pre-determine one's assessment of particular arguments.

Taylor's articulation of the immanent frame exposes a tension within the many social imaginaries that makeup the North Atlantic world. This tension is manifest as a dialectic opposition fueled by contrasting reactions to the immanent frame, particularly the buffered self and the modern moral order of mutual benefit. Attempts to overcome this tension are often blocked by spin, which denigrates others and impedes dialectic engagement.

It is imperative to understand the origins of entrenchment. Such an understanding would enable dialogue that recognizes the common normative expectations of the immanent frame, and realizes that the modern secular experience is cross pressured between mutually fragile perspectives.

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[111] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 557-556.
[112] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 567.

Chapter 2.

Discursive Entrenchment within the Immanent Frame

The previous chapter describes how the immanent frame provides an unformulated background to one's thinking. Of particular importance is the background's effect on one's perspective; it holds the modern individual captive, shapes experience and thoughts, and subtly pre-determines his stance on myriad issues.[113] Oppositional interpretations of the immanent frame will structure experience as either "open" or "closed" to transcendence.[114] Taylor's focus on these opposing backgrounds, or world structures, enables a re-interpretation of discourses concerning modern belief.[115]

These world structures are an invaluable interpretive tool, but applying them to a particular discourse is potentially dangerous. Like any explanatory concept, it may not correspond with reality. The explanatory power of the world structures, and the entire immanent frame, is only sound if these correspond with discursive positions in the world. In this case, the immanent frame is only as accurate as Taylor's reform master narrative that explains its origins. An inaccuracy in the grand narrative may result in an inaccurate depiction of secularity.

Now as an explanation of the origins of the immanent frame, the reform master narrative is multi-faceted and convincing. Taylor provides textual examples that mark new elite approaches to religion in the wake of the modern order of mutual benefit, and then carefully charts their emergence as popularly held positions through the "nova effect."[116]

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[113] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 557.
[114] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 550.
[115] As was made clear in Dilemmas 1 and 2 in Taylor, *A Secular Age.*
[116] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 299.

However, proof of contemporary world structures is one-dimensional. Section V of *A Secular Age* relies entirely on textual analysis of works meant to epitomize either reading of the immanent frame. While world structures are recognizable in a poem or ethical argument, and these do capture common reactions to the immanent frame, more could be done to prove that the majority is influenced by either background. Because he only offers textual analysis to prove typical orientations, Taylor's concepts remain somewhat insulated from the world. Consequently, their validity as interpretive tools is questionable.

This chapter maintains that *A Secular Age* clarifies issues pertaining to secularity by demonstrating that the open and closed world structures are driving perspectives evident in common discourses. To this end, selected works of Karen Armstrong and Paul Kurtz are exposed as contemporary articulations of the open and closed world structures respectively. They are selected for comparison for three reasons.

First, each develops an ethical argument within a background that is explicitly open or closed to a transcendent good. Armstrong seeks to restore "ekstasis," a qualitative state leading to interpersonal compassion. This qualitative state is achieved through long-term immersion in a mythological perspective, which is an almost impossible task in the logical confines of this time. On the other hand, Kurtz offers a set of criteria by which actions may be judged. His "eupraxophy" is a neologistic compound word comprising the Greek root words eu, praxis, and sophia, which translates as good, practical, and wisdom.[117] Eupraxophy is an a priori criterion that ought to be employed when evaluating conduct. The "good" of eupraophy is the good of exclusive humanism. It is framed by a scientific-materialist closed world structure and incompatible with any transcendentally grounded morality.

Secondly, though the moralities sought by Armstrong and Kurtz differ in their groundings, the processes through which they are constructed are remarkably similar, and therefore readily comparable. Each looks to the past in a selective fashion, highlighting key events and figures that support a pre-existing perspective. From

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[117] Paul Kurtz, *Eupraxophy: Living Without Religion* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1989), 14.

selective histories each derives an origin story for an other, defined by some key defect that results in improper or immoral conduct. In fact, each historical argument is carried out as a means to situate a contemporary ethical argument. The historiographical simplicities resemble the rhetorical assumptions Taylor describes as "spin."[118]

Thirdly, and most importantly, Armstrong and Kurtz attempt to instigate social change; each furthers an agenda that seeks to actualize their respective arguments. Armstrong has invested considerable effort in developing the "Charter for Compassion" and Kurtz broadcasted his "Secular Humanist" ideology through the Center for Inquiry. As a consequence, both have become influential public figures. More importantly, the wide reception of the charter, and the continued growth of the Center for Inquiry demonstrate that these respective articulations of world structures appeal to many.

But the Charter for Compassion and the Center for Inquiry do more than prove the commonality of each world structure. Popular participation in either demonstrates widespread subscription to the kind of history that informs each agenda, and these historical perspectives clearly feature an other. By signing the charter or contributing to the CFI, one is, to whatever degree of clarity, entrenching himself in that world structure against his conception of the other.[119] The same sort of entrenchment that has been articulated so blatantly in the Charter of Values is not as peculiar as it might seem. While such a charter is only possible in a very particular context like Quebec after the Quiet Revolution, it exemplifies a definitive entrenchment of this time.

2.1   Armstrong

Armstrong's historical argument enables a critique of modernity. Developments of the modern age lead to the conflation of two kinds of truth differentiated throughout pre-modernity: logos and mythos. A mythological truth is unlike logical truth because it is not a matter of intellectual assent. Mythos is concerned with ideas and experiences that

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[118] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 549-551, 555.

[119] Taylor argues that one's position in the immanent frame is derived partly through a rejection of other positions. See *A Secular Age,* 598.

cannot be grasped conceptually; a myth is appreciable only when it is manifest in conduct.[120] This modern turn from mythos is no mere intellectual shift, but a defect that culminates in the horrors of the twentieth century.

In response, Armstrong encourages the pursuit of interpersonal compassion, which is ultimately a matter of mythos. Immersion in mythos results in ekstasis, the qualitative state involving a kind of self-forgetfulness, through which rightly guided individuals are able to transcend self-centeredness. Finally the modern individual will uncover a forgotten moral source enabling him to "feel with the other."[121]

The fundamental step in Armstrong's critique of modernity is the equivocation of religion with myth. Myth is a means to render certain mysterious and permanent features of human existence intelligible.[122] True appreciation of the sacred requires deliberate and consistent application of a myth's truth to one's life. This definition of myth is quite unlike current assumptions concerning religious traditions, which are often reduced to a set of beliefs requiring the intellectual assent of a believer. The contemporary world, then, is deeply flawed because the real nature and function of religion have been confused. From the seventeenth century onwards, religion is increasingly reduced to a set of metaphysical beliefs subject to rational and empirical evaluation. In order to understand Armstrong's modern dissent, a more detailed examination of mythos and logos is necessary.

Religion ought to be recognized as a matter of mythos, not logos. This is a central argument present in many of Armstrong's writings, but articulated explicitly in *The Case for God.* Mythos and logos signify two modes of thought seen as complimentary in most pre-modern cultures: "*Logos* ('reason') was the pragmatic mode of thought that enabled people to function effectively in the world… But it had its limitations: it could not

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[120] Karen Armstrong, *A Case for God* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2010), xii.
[121] Armstrong, *Case for God,* xvii.
[122] Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 3-5.

assuage human grief or find ultimate meaning in life's struggles. For that people turned to *mythos* or 'myth.'"[123]

Armstrong's "logos" involves an ideal correspondence where mythos does not. The logical mode of thought involves a subject perceiving a distinct object, and perception is either accurate or misleading. Furthermore, the accuracy of a perception or belief is verifiable.

Conversely, the cultivation of mythological understanding requires an immersion of the subject in the object, undermining any separation and ideal correspondence. A myth, through various rituals, exposes something profoundly true about humanity, and demands the repeated application of this truth to one's life. A moral truth is an object that the subject internalizes through consistent application, eventually cultivating an adequate appreciation or "understanding" for it.[124] In this way, the subject embodies the object, and the verification of the mythological truth is its very manifestation within the practitioner.

Now the categorical nature of Armstrong's argument proves problematic. Myth may not, in fact, tell us something that is profoundly true for all ages. Particular myths are as varied as the contexts from which they are created. Additionally, any one myth is open to multiple interpretations, and its significance certainly changes as it is revisited through time. There is an inevitable tension between an abstraction labeled "myth" and the varied myths of history. If the actual moral truths are varied, mythos, as a mode of understanding truth through application, might not be as homogenous as it is presented.

Armstrong is certainly aware of the problems inherent in such a homogenous definition. She justifies it by concentrating on two invariable features of all myths. First, the qualitative state of mythological understanding always involves a numinous quality. The extra-rational quality of this numinous state is constant though the understanding may result in many contrasting kinds of activity, from "bacchanalian excitement" to a

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[123] Armstrong, *Case for God,* xi.
[124] Armstrong, *Case for God,* xiii.

deep calm, or dread to a mixture of awe and humility.[125] Secondly, the human needs served by myth are universal. For example, myth is always concerned with death, a mysterious and inescapable event that must be made intelligible.[126] Knowledge of one's own mortality requires some addressing regardless of the cultural context; the mythological interpretations of death are varied, but the deep-seated understanding of mortality is categorically manifest in the subject as a mythos.

Framing mythos as a response to universal experiences justifies two controversial steps in Armstrong's critique of modernity. First, religious traditions are treated synchronistically, as they all articulate the universal need for mythos. Secondly, the ubiquity of myth reveals an essential quality of humanity, which must also transform one's view of human history—which becomes the history of Homo Religiosus.[127] Without these two steps, Armstrong's critique of the modern turn to logos would be based on a rather arbitrary preference for the pre-modern. But mythos is no mere out-dated mode of thought; it is a categorical feature of humanity. To conflate mythos and logos or neglect an essential part of human nature will prove destructive throughout modernity, which Armstrong portrays as the "child of logos."[128]

Early Modernity is characterized by a growing confidence in the human ability to control the environment and understand his place in it. It is a time of dynamic change. Where earlier societies did not possess the same technological mastery of their environments, modern technological advances offer a break from rhythmic life centered primarily on subsistence. The achievements of this age relied on the triumph of the scientific spirit: "Efficiency was the new watchword. Everything had to work. A new idea or invention had to be capable of rational proof and be shown to conform to the external world."[129] The logical rigor that dominates the age is inevitably applied to mythological truths.

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[125] Karen Armstrong, *A History of God. From Abraham to the Present: the 4,000-year Quest for God* (Mandarin Paperbacks, 1994), 11.

[126] Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth,* 3.

[127] Armstrong, *Case for God,* 10.

[128] Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth,* 119.

[129] Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth,* 121.

Armstrong illustrates this modern shift towards logos by comparing the ontological arguments of Anselm and Descartes. Pre-modern convention recognizes mythos and logos as complementary, and seeks to apply each appropriately, where the modern convention relies solely on logos as proof of God's existence.

Anselm exemplifies the pre-modern paradigm. Making use of ontological reasoning renders a kind of mythological understanding intelligible to many. Yet the many significances of God's existence are hardly contained in his rational proof. God remains opaque to Anselm, whose use of reason, along with other faculties like imagination and emotion, allows the lowly human only a better appreciation of God. Despite the utility of logic, one is meant to advance "through faith to understanding, rather than proceeding through understanding to faith."[130]

Now a modern critic might interpret Anselm's statement to encourage a leap of faith. If the logical coherence of the argument does not constitute a significant proof, then one is actually forcing the mind to accept incomprehensible doctrines prematurely. But, as Armstrong argues, Anselm is merely arguing that religious truth makes no sense without expressing practical commitment to the idea.[131]

On the other hand, Descartes' ontological proof is taken to exemplify the modern logical turn; the validity of any extra-rational commitment must be doubted from the outset. In addition to the centrality of logos, Descartes epitomizes the autonomy and confidence peculiar to modern mind:

> The only animate thing in the entire cosmos was the thinking self… It was impossible that a finite being could by its own efforts conceive the idea of perfection, so it must follow 'that it had been placed in me by a Nature which was really more perfect than mine could be, and which even had within itself all the perfections of which I could form any idea—that is to say, to put it in a word, which was god.[132]

While Anselm's God functions mysteriously and remains ultimately unknowable, the Cartesian God takes on definite roles and attributes. God necessarily exists, and he

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[130] Armstrong, *Case for God,* 131.

[131] Armstrong, *Case for God,* 132.

[132] Armstrong, *Case for God,* 196.

is not a deceiver.[133] Descartes proof is differentiated from knowing God through faith, an attitude of trust and loyalty, which is crucial if God is to be understood in any meaningful way.[134]

A comparison of the two ontologies reveals how God is reduced from mystery to something open to empirical and rational evaluation. By the close of the modern era, Armstrong's mythos is almost entirely lost but for key figures of the Romantic movement. Most of the discourse surrounding matters of religion involves an atheist critique of the definite claims of a religious tradition followed by a fundamentalist response that fails to separate myth from literal truth. These arguments concerning the validity of belief, understood as intellectual assent, reify the primacy of logos. The complete loss of mythos by the late 19th century is epitomized in the agnostic critique of theism, which sees it as intellectually and morally perverse as it demands belief without evidence.[135]

The loss of mythos extends well beyond the confines of that particular discourse. The domination of logos in the modern west goes hand in hand with the devaluation of human life, culminating in various atrocities of the twentieth century. Armstrong's criticism of late-modernity is reminiscent of Taylor's concerns regarding instrumental reason; while technological mastery is in some ways beneficial, it develops alongside and causes the breaking of out-dated moral orders, leading to a disenchantment of things once sacred.[136] An increasing technical mastery of the environment contributes to horrific aspects of modernity, which are fully expressed in the travesties of the twentieth century. The self-destructive nihilism of "Homo Technologicus" reaches its zenith in Nazi genocide, exemplifying the rational, well-organized and goal-oriented nature of modernity.[137]

Yet a cursory glance at pre-modern history shows that humans were just as prone to violence before the loss of mythos. Modern atrocities are peculiar because of their magnitude and organization. The first point is obvious and uncontroversial. The

[133] Armstrong, *Case for God,* 196.

[134] Armstrong, *History of God,* 234-235.

[135] Armstrong, *Case for God*, 253.

[136] Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Concord, Ontario: Anansi Press Ltd., 1991), 4-5.

[137] Armstrong, *Case for God,* 275-276.

technologically inclined modern war machine is more devastating than any pre-modern army. The second point regarding organization follows naturally. An increased capability for destruction will necessarily demand an instrumental organization of violence.

Humanity cannot continue along these lines, and attempts to "re-sacralize" modernity have proven aggressive and entirely lacking the compassion and numinous experience essential to religious life.[138] Armstrong undermines the modern discourse on religion, which always conceptualizes god, through the recovery of ekstasis. Ekstasis, the product of mythos, is a viable option precisely because it is a universal human experience, and its extra-rational nature separates it from any particular fundamentalist or atheist position.

Ekstasis is concerned with ideas and experiences that exceed conceptual grasp. These experiences exist at the limits of reason, and often evoke dissolution of the ego. Music can exemplify the limits of conceptualization and the escape from one's self:

> Music goes beyond the reach of words: it is not *about* anything. A late Beethoven quartet does not represent sorrow but elicits it in hearer and player alike, and yet it is emphatically not a sad experience. Like tragedy, it brings intense pleasure and insight. We seem to experience sadness directly in a way that transcends ego, because this is not *my* sadness but sorrow itself. In music, therefore, subjective and objective become one.[139]

Armstrong is confident that this ecstatic dissolution of the ego enables a co-operative and compassionate interaction with others. It seems Armstrong is articulating an inherent problem of the "buffered self." The atomized individual of modernity interacts with separate individuals for mutual benefit rather than sharing a deep sense of connectedness. A strong sense of modern individuality grounds codes of conduct meant to ensure mutual benefit, yet, for Armstrong, it really impedes a more genuine and crucial interaction, so it must be deconstructed.

The Socratic dialogue illustrates how this deconstruction of self should function dialogically. Through discourse, character-defining conclusions are reduced to a set of

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[138] Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism* (New York: Ballantine Publishing Group, 2000), 370-371.
[139] Armstrong, *Case for God*, xiv.

arbitrary assumptions. Unlike the modern discourse between atheists and fundamentalist mentioned above, this process is not adversarial. Effective dialogue should result in ekstasis. Each party must do more than hear and consider, they must "inhabit" the other point of view.[140] Although the interlocutor's view is deconstructed to show its arbitrary foundation, there is willingness to test one's own deep-seated assumptions once engaged in dialogue. This self-forgetfulness runs contrary to the kind of objectification of others epitomized in the darkest episodes of modernity.

Armstrong's attempt to recover mythos is clearly an "itinerary" out of the confines of the buffered identity and excarnated moral sources.[141] First, mythos is transformative; it enables a co-operative dialogue involving interlocutors co-operating to transform their self-image. To a very limited extent, such an interaction constitutes a recovery of the porous self, allowing the modern individual to undergo a "transcendent encounter."[142] Secondly, as mythos is a universal feature of pre-modern humanity, its recovery provides an alternative moral source to the excarnate code fetishism dominant within the order of mutual benefit.[143]

2.2 Kurtz

Unlike Armstrong, whose historical research is extensive, Kurtz is relatively disinterested in intellectual history per se. His closed world perspective is derived from a typical subtraction story. Perhaps this is unsurprising, considering one's view of the immanent frame is determined not by entertaining a set of beliefs, but by a deep seated and unformulated framework, or "background" understanding.[144] A convincing historical argument should anticipate possible counter-arguments, but this becomes unnecessary because latent background assumptions render the closed world perspective obvious. Additionally, the fact that Kurtz is allowed to articulate a closed world ethic without critical

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[140] Armstrong, *Case for God,* 63.

[141] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 745.

[142] Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, 148.

[143] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 704.

[144] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 549.

historical contextualization supports Taylor's claim that the closed world orientation is hegemonic in the academy.[145]

In other words, Kurtz's perspective is inflected with a set of assumptions that pre-determine his historical perspective. Before his historical argument can be exposed in greater detail, it is worth considering what informs these assumptions. In this case, the American socio-religious context beginning in the late nineteen seventies is key, as Kurtz develops his ideas as a polemic against the rise of American religious fundamentalism. American fundamentalism presented Kurtz with two features that influence his reaction.

First, fundamentalist groups were united around an agenda of political reform. Not only were they easily identifiable, they were perceived as trespassers in the political sphere. Evidently this has a two-part affect: (1) it motivates Kurtz to present an alternative secular humanist agenda, and (2) informs a vision of democracy that requires insulation from religious piety, which erodes "humankind's confidence in its own powers to solve human problems."[146]

Secondly, fundamentalists were imagining themselves as a collective. A common background understanding allowed like-minded individuals, in this case Christian Americans of various denominations, to mobilize and seek political and societal reforms. Although it may have been unintended, such an identifiable collective and pro-active agenda was provoking a proportionate response. Kurtz's reaction is proportionate; myriad historical figures are categorized together under the banner of Secular Humanism, and they epitomize an alternative agenda.[147]

Instead of offering a particular critique of religious incursion into the political sphere, Kurtz presents Secular Humanism as an alternative world-view, antithetical to

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[145] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 549.

[146] Paul Kurtz, *In Defense of Secular Humanism* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1983), 14.

[147] This brief historical survey is published well after the context in question. It is a mature articulation of Kurtz's polemic against political fundamentalists that began decades earlier. See Paul Kurtz, *What is Secular Humanism* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2007).

that presented by fundamentalism.[148] This sort of response contextualizes his particular battle within the perennial struggle between repressive superstition and liberated reason. Religious modes of thought always impede the freedom of inquiry of those who wish to critically examine a religious tradition or merely live free from them in a secular democracy. A particular group like Jerry Falwell's "Moral Majority" is not exceptionally depraved; it is just another instance of the oppressive and superstitious attacking the liberated and rational.

Extrapolation of this kind leads to the construction of a binary typology. What is true of one fundamentalist holds true for all. This type invites further abstraction. The Christian fundamentalist is categorized with the Jew and Muslim due to his belief in miraculous events proclaimed in sacred books immune to skeptical scrutiny.[149] Finally, even figures not commonly linked to a religious tradition, like Descartes, are loosely associated with these others due to their flawed attempts to prove the existence of some transcendental figure. A very diverse and complex subject is reduced to a typological conflict: one can make the leap beyond empirical evidence and believe in the transcendent, or remain appropriately skeptical of such claims, which results in a materialist world-view closed to transcendence.

In this way, features of a very peculiar and recent American discourse inform categories that are then projected onto history. But this sort of projection is certainly not limited to explicitly historical arguments. In fact, Kurtz has a way of implying much about his interlocutors' historical origins without addressing them directly:

> Scientific inquiry has expanded the horizons of our understanding of the universe and the place of the human species within it without myth or fantasy; the frontiers of research are pushed forward by dramatic discoveries every day. This had led to a steady increase in the amount of knowledge that we have amassed about the universe. Unfortunately, not

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[148] Kurtz, *Eupraxophy*, 127.

[149] Paul Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation: A Critique of Religion and the Paranormal* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1986), 349.

everyone appreciates the significance of the new scientific conceptions of the cosmos.[150]

Though it may appear uncontroversial, this anecdote involves two serious implications and exposes a failure to seriously consider counter-arguments. The first two sentences present the fruits of scientific inquiry as an unqualified positive. Later Kurtz will qualify his statement, arguing that knowledge gained through scientific investigation leads to better understanding of facts, and, consequently, better informed choices.[151] This information is good because it is useful. Yet this invites an obvious objection. Armstrong rightly argues that scientific progress has also enabled some of humanity's most horrific events. There is an inherent danger accompanying these gains that remains unaddressed.

Secondly, the last sentence negatively groups together "everyone" who does not "appreciate" advances of modern science. Now it is somewhat reasonable that the contemporary "theist" is unhappy with the naturalistic world often associated with science because it allows for no transcendent creator.[152] However, there is no good reason to assume he is necessarily displeased with scientific advances encountered in daily life (smart phones, for example). But more importantly still, there is no apparent need to investigate his displeasure.

Most of Kurtz's later writing is loaded with historical implications of this kind, and his agenda depends on this oppositional typology outlined above. However, an explicit historical account is offered in two publications: *The Transcendental Temptation* and *Eupraxohpy: Living without Religion.* The former delineates various types of thought that have led to the affirmation of the transcendent, all of which are undermined. This survey allows for Kurtz to indicate his own ethic by negating this kind of limited and misguided thought. The latter moves beyond this negation, offering a naturalistic world-view and a corresponding ethic embodied in the neologism "eupraxophy."

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[150] Paul Kurtz, "Naturalism and the Future" in *Multi-Secularism: A New Agenda,* edited by Paul Kurtz (London: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 23.

[151] Kurtz, "Naturalism and the Future", 25.

[152] Kurtz, "Naturalism and the Future", 25.

The Transcendental Temptation begins by defining the epistemological break between the ordinary and the transcendent. Historically, there are two basic types of transcendence, one weak and the other strong. The weaker is epitomized in Plato; an ultimate reality beyond this realm of appearances is beyond experience, but knowable through reason. The stronger break is illustrated by the Kantian distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal; the phenomenal alone is knowable through "Forms of Intuition and Categories of the Understanding" while the noumenal or "real" world is entirely beyond human understanding.[153]

Strong transcendence renders the object incompatible with regular modes of thought. Knowledge of the transcendent requires an entirely extra-rational experience. Furthermore, the subjective irrational nature of the mystic experience renders the qualities of the transcendent relatively opaque. Conversely, weak transcendence allows for a partial grasp of the object by reason: the existence of the transcendent can be proven, and some of its characteristics can be inferred. Stronger and weaker variants correspond with respective approaches to the transcendent: mysticism and theism.

Aspects of strong transcendence predetermine key features of mystic experience. The "ineffable" characteristic of mystical experience precludes any possibility of it being described to others.[154] Mystic experience is unlike prophetic revelation and experiences of the paranormal precisely because they are ineffable. Though the prophets of each Abrahamic religion are differentiated from mystics, each tradition abounds with mystics, including Jewish Chassidic mystics [sic], Sufis, and notable Christian mystics like St. Augustine and St. Theresa of Avila.[155]

Kurtz critiques the authority of mysticism in two stages. First, the subjective content produced by a mystical experience is attributed to the religious contexts where they occur. These experiences appear as encounters with the transcendent simply because they are organized as such. The religious institution dominates Theresa of

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[153] Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 24.

[154] Kurtz draws heavily from William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* when defining mysticism. See *Transcendental Temptation* 92-94, 97.

[155] Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 92, 95.

Avila's cultural milieu. Her lifestyle of withdrawn contemplation provokes the mystic experience, and her descriptions of the experience are pre-determined by her social context.

If the depiction of the experience is reduced to social context, it follows that a shift from a "religious" to a "scientific culture" allows for a naturalistic causal interpretation.[156] The mystic experience becomes readily comparable to all sorts of disenchanted experiences of today, including various stages of sleep, schizophrenia, and psychedelic hallucinogens.[157] What were once authoritative proofs of transcendence are reduced to mere psychological states.

Now the weaker transcendence can be understood through reason. The typical theist begins by focusing on the "mystery of being" and then postulates some ordering agent—be it a first cause, intelligent designer or creator of the universe—who orders this immanent existence.[158] "God" comes to signify omnipotence and omniscience, traits compatible with the God of religious tradition, yet not dependent on the authority of revelation or mystic encounters.

The same shift to a scientific context that undermines mysticism exposes the weakness of theism. Rational arguments that seek to prove the existence of a transcendent force share a categorical feature; they are all provoked by a sense of mystery concerning existence, what Kurtz refers to as the "mystery of being."[159] The theist posits some transcendental source just beyond the realm of existence, which also serves to provide order to its creation. Now the post-enlightenment observer is able to judge arbitrary assumptions at play in different theistic arguments and weigh them against an ever-increasing collection of natural data derived scientifically. An empirical survey of the world reveals that there is as much disorder and chaos as there is order.[160] This being so, there is no good reason to argue for a deeper ordering force behind existence.

[156] Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 97.
[157] Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 99.
[158] Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 285.
[159] Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 285.
[160] Kurtz, *The Transcendental Temptation*, 288.

The theist seems to suffer from two inter-connected shortcomings: (1) a lack of empirical knowledge regarding the world around him, and (2) an arbitrary depiction of existence, one fixated on an apparent order in the world which necessitates a transcendent creator or order giver.

Debunking these two out-dated modes of transcendence helps define Kurtz's perspective through negation. The secular humanist outlook is confined to a materialist theory of reality, appreciable through disengaged reason and scientific observation. With the rational and mystical arguments for transcendence undermined, Kurtz is left with the task of articulating an ethic that fits with this materialist worldview.

His secular humanist ethic is informed by a method of inquiry motivated by skepticism and dependent on the scientific method. One ought to maintain a skeptical pre-disposition when presented with a belief. Like any hypothesis or theory, a belief must be verified objectively by scrutinizing supporting evidence obtained through scientific observation.[161] When evaluating a belief, the secular humanist ought to appeal to observable experience, preferably evidence that can be replicated or certified. If evidence cannot be replicated, the belief in question should be weighed against theories and beliefs already accepted as reliable.[162]

There is an imperative aspect of this secular humanist ethic. Together, the skeptical predisposition and scientific evaluation of evidence constitutes a "critical intelligence" that must be applied freely to all areas of human life, including "religious, philosophical, ethical, and political concerns that are often left unexamined."[163]

With a materialist world-view and the corresponding ethic sketched out roughly, the significance and effect of eupraxophy become obvious. Eupraxophy translates as "good practical wisdom" and Kurtz argues that secular humanism itself is a eupraxophy.[164] When read in isolation, eupraxophy appears as somewhat vague and relatively benign. However, when read in the context of Kurtz's own ideological struggle

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[161] Kurtz, *Eupraxophy,* 27.

[162] Kurtz, *Eupraxophy,* 28.

[163] Kurtz, *Eupraxophy*, 29.

[164] Kurtz, *Eupraxophy,* 14, 23.

against fundamentalism, it is clearly a means for entrenchment against the type who fail to guard against the transcendental temptation. In effect, Kurtz renders his own prescriptive ethic so obvious that it only makes good practical sense.

2.3   Entrenchment

At this point it is worth relating this survey to the central goal of this chapter: proving that *A Secular Age* renders myriad positions concerning secularism intelligible by relating them to open and closed world structures. Often there is no apparent continuity between various "boosters" and "knockers" of modernity. However, if they are exposed as typical discursive positions, in this case within the immanent frame, one begins to appreciate the effects of the frame in the discourses. To this end, two bodies of work have been exposed as types outlined in the immanent frame, which, to some degree, has exposed the efficacy of Taylor's construct as an interpretive concept.

Demonstrating this efficacy helps to negate an apparent weakness in *A Secular Age*. Indeed, if there is a weakness in Taylor's depiction of modern secularity, it is that it lacks evidence, and may not correspond to the actual secular context. It could be argued that Taylor is too fixated on articulating oppositional world structures in a theoretical frame and fails to provide common examples of either background. More research is required to determine whether these structures are driving discourse in the actual world. Without some empirical confirmation, Taylor might be misrepresenting modern secularity. This potential danger has provoked notable apprehension in subsequent commentary.[165]

Now it must be noted that Taylor does allude to key works that exemplify various closed and open world structures. Various positions within the frame are explained through appeals to notable figures that epitomize the respective orientations.[166] But this

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[165] Jose Casanova, "A Secular Age: Dawn of Twilight," in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age,* eds. Michael Warner, Jonathan Vanantwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (Caimbridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), 271.

[166] The immanent revolt or immanent counter enlightenment, a variant of exclusive humanism, is constantly described through allusions to Nietzsche. See 599, 642, 660 in *A Secular Age.*

does not adequately bridge the gap between concept and world. Even if actual manifestations of a type, "anti-humanism" for example, are epitomized by Nietzsche, can one assume this adequately captures the various anti-humanist manifestations as they crop up in various contexts?

Probably not, but providing extensive empirical proofs of this kind would be a digression in an already massive project. As it is, the worth of the immanent frame as an interpretive tool cannot be taken for granted. This potential danger has motivated this chapter thus far. The works of both Armstrong and Kurtz certainly exemplify Taylor's oppositional world structures.

Now there remains a final element of the immanent frame that lacks strong evidence. This is, of course, the widespread opposition between open and closed world structures itself, which is no trivial matter. Taylor constantly argues that one's orientation in the immanent frame is derived through what it rejects.[167] The closed world structure defines itself through negation of the open world structure, and vice versa. This derivation of one's perspective through negation of an other is obvious in Armstrong and Kurtz. Still, it remains to be seen how those who embody these extremes, as well as those who fall somewhere in between them, partake in this opposition and define their own position. Simply pointing at opposing perspectives is inadequate; it is imperative to demonstrate the connection between ideologies and common agendas, and how these agendas are demonstrating the kind of widespread entrenchment Taylor describes.

To this end, this chapter concludes with a very brief analysis of both Armstrong's Charter for Compassion and the mission statement of the Center for Inquiry. Each agenda exemplifies an oppositional interpretation of the immanent frame, including an other to be overcome with a prescriptive ethic.

Armstrong's Charter for Compassion attempts to convey the need to recover mythos to a wide audience. However, the potential signer of the charter is not exposed to any specialized terms. Rather than explaining how this age is missing out on pre-

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[167] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 598.

modern paths to ekstasis, Armstrong simply calls for compassionate conduct in all realms of life:

> Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honour the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect… We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion… We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.[168]

Now the description of compassion in the charter is identical to the effects of ekstasis obtained through mythos as described in *A Case For God*. Moreover, Armstrong identifies the charter as a practical implementation of her central thesis.[169] But there is a noticeable disconnect between the two. While, the recovery of mythos goes hand in hand with a critique of modernity, this call for compassion does not clearly indicate any such critique.

The Charter for Compassion merely implies a critique of modernity by referring to those who have "failed to live compassionately." The broad language of the charter suggests this conduct is an all too common quality of this age. Even if they have not read Armstrong's publications, signers of the charter are acknowledging the absence of compassion, and identifying it with some sense of loss. While each signer understands this loss individually, they are all doing two things: (1) affirming an agenda that fits their own inarticulate background and (2) defining themselves against a projected other out in the world, who does not embody their own understanding of compassion.

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[168] Karen Armstrong, "Sign and Share the Charter for Compassion," http://charterforcompassion.org/the-charter.
[169] Armstrong, *Case for God,* 331-332.

Signing the charter exemplifies the entrenchment inherent in the immanent frame. Here it is crucial to remember that most of the signers are not immediately conscious of all this. Taylor argues that most fall somewhere between the world structures. Most would require some interrogation as to who is acting without compassion, and it is very likely that the "uncompassionate" are those whose actions typically accompany the other world structure. Hypothetically, even someone more of Kurtz's persuasion might end up signing the charter. For him, the uncompassionate other is likely epitomized by the religious institution that infringes on the rights of the modern individual. Though his assent to the charter is confused, he entrenches his position through rejection of the other.

In this case, The Charter for Compassion demonstrates how entrenchment closer to the middle of the frame becomes confused. "Compassion" is a very plastic term, readily imported into one's background and given a very particular significance. Because Armstrong does not convey the full meaning of the term, one could agree with the charter but disagree strongly with the corresponding critique of modernity. Yet, it is possible that a significant number of signers do understand Armstrong's entire argument. For them, the charter is also an opportunity for those of an open world persuasion to sign and re-affirm their stance against the other of modernity.

Conversely, Kurtz's Center For Inquiry presents those of a closed world disposition with a clear agenda of continued liberation from a persistently oppressive other. The CFI mission statement outlines three long-term goals:

1. an end to the influence that religion and pseudoscience have on public policy
2. an end to the privileged position that religion and pseudoscience continue to enjoy in many societies
3. an end to the stigma attached to being a nonbeliever, whether the nonbeliever describes her/himself as an atheist, agnostic, humanist, freethinker or skeptic.[170]

Such broad goals are pursued by an equally broad array of activity. CFI centers serve as a multi-purpose platform for debate, panel discussion, and presentation

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[170] "About the Center for Inquiry," last updated 2013, http://www.centerforinquiry.net/about.

amongst other functions.[171] The agenda also reaches beyond the centers themselves. Recently the CFI has funded a multimedia campaign broadcasting to the public that "Millions of Americans are living happily without Religion."[172]

While the connection between Armstrong's argument and agenda is unclear, the CFI's three-point mission statement captures Kurtz's writings. However, and unsurprisingly, both are equally vague when identifying the source of problems. The Charter for Compassion calls for a change in conduct, and many CFI messages convey banal statements that gently challenge "religion." Yet these unclear agendas should seem unsurprising for two reasons. First, as has been made clear in this chapter, Armstrong's recovery of mythos and Kurtz's materialist ethic are motivated by ill-defined others.

Secondly, this entrenchment is an anticipated feature of the immanent frame. Not only is one defined by what he rejects, what is rejected is also misconstrued. When the other world structure remains vague, it is immeasurably easier to explain it away as, in these cases, uncompassionate or superstitious and invasive. One can also remain unaware of the negation altogether. Often a particular orientation within the immanent frame is embraced simply because it seems an obvious conclusion.[173] The CFI epitomizes this; secular humanism is obviously the right direction for humankind and must be affirmed. Those who do not recognize this are in some way lacking, and will be convinced or die off in time.

A Secular Age renders this discursive entrenchment appreciable, but its utility may be missed due to a lack of actual evidence for world structures. This chapter proves that disparate figures like Armstrong and Kurtz do conform to these world structures in the immanent frame. More importantly, the popular agendas inspired by each perspective prove that entrenchment is all too common.

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[171] Paul Kurtz, "The New Secularism," (presentation delivered at the Center for Inquiry, Toronto, Ontario, November 27, 2008).

[172] "Millions of Americans are living happily without religion," last modified 2013, Center for Inquiry, livingwithoutreligion.org.

[173] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 550.

This chapter has demonstrated that *A Secular Age* renders myriad voices surrounding abstract issues intelligible by interpreting them through the immanent frame. The following chapter explores how this awareness, to some degree, necessarily undermines the widespread entrenchment that inhibits discourse.

Chapter 3.

Towards Dialectic Engagement

The previous chapter demonstrates the utility of the immanent frame as an explanatory concept. *A Secular Age* clarifies the less obvious aspects of popular agendas concerning belief. Yet this is only one of two reasons why Taylor's work is so important. The second follows as a necessary consequence of this clarifying effect. This chapter will demonstrate how this new clarity undermines pre-conceptions of others and furthers dialectic engagement within the immanent frame.

Dialectic engagement is only possible once the sort of entrenchment exposed in the last chapter is overcome. Once it has been made clear that entrenchment is a ubiquitous feature of the immanent frame, "spin" becomes recognizable and questionable. Recognition of spin must lead to a re-consideration of other previously negated perspectives, and those that embody them. Without exception, the clarifying effect initiates a move away from entrenchment based on misconceptions of the other, and towards direct dialectic engagement. But before this second effect can be explained further, it is necessary to review how *A Secular Age* helps to clarify discourses on belief.

First, Taylor isolates some ideas that have operated in the background of modern societies and continue to dominate the modern imagination. These are the definitive features of the immanent frame that are driving discourse. All live as buffered individuals within in a society geared towards mutual benefit where time is secular. Furthermore, this is a natural order, an immanent world separate from a possible transcendent one.[174]

These "ideas" that characterize the immanent frame are better described as social assumptions because they are not commonly conceptualized and examined

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[174] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 542.

directly. Instead, they have come to constitute a social imaginary that enables common practices and normative expectations.[175] These are the definitive assumptions that constitute the "secular" environment where many arguments concerning belief arise.

In other words, these are the background assumptions that operate in the social imagination and drive discourse. Myriad disagreements concerning the propriety of belief, or the ideal relation of religion and the state, for example, though seemingly unrelated, are actually disagreements concerning key aspects of the immanent frame.

This was the case in the previous chapter. Armstrong and Kurtz never engaged in dialogue, but by relating each to the immanent frame it becomes clear how their views are oppositional. This opposition is ultimately driven by opposite reactions to two definitive features of the immanent frame: the buffered self and the morality of mutual benefit. Where Armstrong is attempting to recover mythos as a vehicle to deconstruct the code fetishism in societies of mutual benefit, Kurtz is defending a morality based on the tradition of disengaged rational inquiry.

Secondly, Taylor offers a useful taxonomy of perspectives within the immanent frame. The closed perspective imagines nothing beyond the immanent frame, while there are those who remain open to transcendence. This simple distinction is an invaluable categorizing tool, especially in the age of expressive individualism where new orientations towards belief and disbelief are more varied than ever.

Finally, *A Secular Age* helps to expose entrenchment as an all too common feature of discourse within the immanent frame. Here it is important to separate the manifestation of entrenchment from its causes, and to explore the interplay between the two.

Now entrenchment is experienced as a conscious negation, even resentment, against a perceived other of the immanent frame. One's views are sometimes determined through a conscious negation of another's, and cumulatively these judgments come to define one's own perspective. Simply put, people can come to define

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[175] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries,* 23.

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themselves against others. Negation of this sort can lead to a polarization of views. This is exemplified in the previous chapter, which suggests Kurtz's very specific struggle against American Fundamentalism polarized his greater interpretation of religion itself. But entrenchment is not always produced through a conscious negation of a perceived other.

This is only the case some of the time. It is true that people are defining themselves by differentiation. Yet facile preconceptions of an other can also impede any objective assessment his view. In this case, entrenchment precedes negation altogether, as there was never a chance the other's views could be entertained. Taylor describes this as the "anticipatory confidence" of spin, where "one's thinking is clouded or cramped by a powerful picture which prevents one seeing important aspects of reality."[176]

Anticipatory confidence usually oversimplifies complex issues, as was the case with Armstrong's depiction of modernity as uniformly lacking, and Kurtz's presentation of transcendence as mere superstition. Now the apparent simplicity of the subject matter has two effects on entrenchment. First, it leads to a further depreciation of the other, who, for whatever reason, is unable to grasp the apparent simplicity of a given issue and act appropriately. Secondly, it can generate further animosity when the other begins to threaten one's own ability to live according to a purely immanent or transcendent interpretation of the immanent frame. So at either extreme of the immanent frame, one's own perspective is both produced and polarized by a negation of the other.

These are three of the ways *A Secular Age* clarifies contemporary discourse on belief, and they constitute what is referred to presently as the "clarifying effect." This chapter exposes how this clarifying effect necessarily results in "meaningful engagement" within the immanent frame. But there is one last point to argue here. Applying Taylor's work is not merely useful or beneficial; it is imperative. It is crucial to recognize how the immanent frame shapes discourse in order to identify and overcome entrenchment wherever it crops up. This chapter seeks to prove these points in three sections.

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[176] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 551.

The first section argues that an awareness of cross pressure is instrumental in overcoming the sort of entrenchment exposed in the previous chapter. The claim here is twofold: (1) entrenched positions must misrepresent an other in order to protect themselves from the reality of cross pressure, and (2) that acknowledging cross pressure as a categorical feature of modern life undermines one's ability to easily negate other orientations in the immanent frame. It is the final facet of the first "clarifying effect" which leads to "meaningful engagement."

This much is already made clear in *A Secular Age.* Once spin becomes recognizable it is impossible to justify. But once spin is undermined, what is left? Unfortunately, Taylor is primarily concerned with exposing closed world spin, and does not offer a clearly articulated alternative.[177]

However, Taylor's earlier publications give a sense of how dialogue in the immanent frame ought to proceed. For this reason, the second section exposes meaningful engagement by drawing on concepts developed in some of Taylor's earlier publications, particularly the crucial role of dialogue in generating identity in *The Malaise of Modernity*, and the corresponding need for interpersonal and political recognition as described in *The Politics of Recognition.* Together, these concepts are clearly the antithesis of the entrenchment generated in the immanent frame, and would enable individuals of various backgrounds to reach overlapping consensus on important issues.

Finally, the third section presents the recently proposed Quebec Charter of Values as a piece of legislation informed by closed world spin. It runs completely contrary to the "open" secularism favoured by Bouchard and Taylor in the Commission on Reasonable Accommodation and subsequently in *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience.* Despite this, Taylor has not argued that the Charter of Values is informed by closed world spin. As a result, it remains unclear how the charter is supported by entrenchment against an other. In this case, the other in question is the public employee who apparently threatens the state neutrality of Quebec by the wearing of religious symbols.

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[177] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 594.

Perhaps this particular legislation was quite rare considering that it originated in a liberal democratic country, which should theoretically safeguard individual rights against the threat of censorship. However, in light of the immanent frame, this recent fiasco reveals that the charter is not so peculiar. Although the charter is context specific, an application of Taylor's schema proves that it is an articulation of entrenchment against an other of the immanent frame.

Though the proposed legislation would have only applied to Quebecois society, the charter exemplifies an ideal type of secularism, what Taylor and Jocelyn Maclure identify as the "republican" approach to state neutrality: "The republican model attributes to secularism the mission of favouring, in addition to respect for moral equality and freedom of conscience, the emancipation of individuals and the growth of a common civic identity, which requires marginalizing religious affiliations and forcing them back into the private sphere."[178] The charter exemplifies a kind of political secularism that extends well beyond Quebec. In France and Turkey, for example, the same drive to state neutrality justifies a prohibition on state officials wearing visible religious symbols.[179]

The Quebec Charter of Values provides an opportunity to make a general argument concerning secularism in liberal democracies; an open view of the immanent frame poses no threat to societies of mutual benefit. And attempts to relegate the individual's religious commitments to the private sphere will not result in state neutrality, but a state unfairly closed to those of an open perspective. It is regrettable that this sort of argument is even necessary, but it seems so in light of widespread support for the charter.

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[178] Jocelyn Maclure and Charles Taylor, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience,* trans. Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011), 34.
[179] Maclure and Taylor, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience,* 42-43.

3.1. Cross Pressure

Before the Charter of Values can be analyzed, it is necessary to expose the connection between the two effects of *A Secular Age.* The preceding chapters have exposed the "clarifying effect" by providing a sketch of the immanent frame and applying it to two popular agendas. The immanent frame helps to clarify matters, but how this new clarity causes "meaningful engagement" remains to be exposed.

The connection between the two is simple. Once one recognizes that everyone is cross pressured between a plurality of oppositional perspectives, and that closed and transcendent orientations struggle to satisfy the same moral demands of modernity, the spin that oversimplifies and negates the other of the immanent frame becomes unacceptable. The kind of entrenchment exposed in the previous chapter is invalidated. In turn, this should result in a dialectic engagement that is free from preconceptions.

But the invalidation of spin will be experienced differently depending on one's orientation within the immanent frame. The concept of cross pressure should seem intuitive to those less attached to spin. Conversely, those firmly entrenched in either a closed or transcendent perspective may be subjected to a violent disorientation. For the latter type, an appreciation of life within the immanent frame as cross pressured must lead to an immediate abandonment of spin for direct dialectic engagement with the other.

Before an appreciation of cross pressure, the other's steadfastness in his orientation could be attributed to stubbornness, stupidity, or a variety of similar deficiencies. Yet facile explanations of this sort are undermined by the fact that neither orientation is better equipped to meet modern demands of morality. Both closed and transcendently grounded ethics are living options because neither is better suited to meeting modern moral demands. Instead, both are challenged by the ethical demands of modernity:

> Before I dealt with a number of dilemmas and demands which both faith
> and exclusive humanism have to deal with. These demands include:
> finding the moral sources which can enable us to live up to our very
> strong universal commitments to human rights and well-being; and finding
> how to avoid the turn to violence which returns uncannily and often

unnoticed in the "higher" forms of life which have supposedly set it aside definitively. Rather than one side clearly possessing the answers that the other one lacks, we find rather that both face the same issues, and each with some difficulty. The more one reflects, the more the easy certainties of either "spin", transcendental or immanentist, are undermined.[180]

Indeed, life in the immanent frame would not be cross pressured if either orientation was proven to satisfy modern moral demands. One option would become unviable, as it would repeatedly fail to conform to normative expectations of modernity.

Recognition that both perspectives struggle within a common moral framework renders the rhetoric of entrenchment unsustainable. This realization must motivate a re-evaluation of the other, and for those who define themselves against an other of the immanent frame, this must also initiate a re-consideration of one's own identity. This is precisely where the "clarifying effect" leads to a more "meaningful engagement."

But so far this explanation has been entirely theoretical. A return to the previous chapter provides two actual examples of spin, both of which are unsustainable. In retrospect, it may seem obvious that neither Armstrong nor Kurtz's views can be held once cross pressure is recognized, but it is worth demonstrating exactly how their misconceptions of the other are undermined.

Armstrong's other has become oblivious to mythos, a timeless instrument used to bypass self-centeredness and cultivate a deeply sensed interpersonal connection. This sense of connectedness is a timeless and universal moral source that begins to fade in the modern era. The imperative to restore the ability to "feel with the other" depends on an oversimplified and generally negative depiction of modern history dominated by an exclusive interest in logos.

Armstrong's depiction of the other is dependent on a depiction of history as a decline. Something has been lost and it must be relearned. But *A Secular Age* is not that simple. Taylor addresses instances where pre-modern mythos certainly clashes with contemporary moral commitments. For example, the pre-modern sense of the numinous is often bound up with violence and sacrifice, which is incompatible with modern

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[180] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 726-727.

commitments to securing the individual's right to life and prosperity. Instead, pre-modern warrior ethics internalize the violence and destruction evident in the world as a means of transcendence:

> We live in the element of violence, but like kings, unafraid, as agents of pure action, dealing death; we are the rulers of death. What was terrifying before is now exciting, exhilarating; we're on a high. It gives a sense to our lives. This is what it means to transcend.[181]

Such internalization of violence is totally inconducive to contemporary societies of mutual benefit. In such societies, any numinous encounter that encourages violence is degraded as pathological.[182]

In light of Taylor's account of numinous violence, Armstrong's critique of modernity becomes problematic. Obviously the Charter for Compassion is in congruence with modern moral standards and Armstrong has no tolerance for violence of any kind. Armstrong is certainly not unaware of the fact mythos can motivate violence. Therefore, her portrayal of disenchanted, or logos centric, modernity as lacking a moral source is thrown into some doubt. It was, of course, the purely immanent ends of modern society that allowed for the very restrictions on numinous violence that Armstrong favours. The picture of modernity that informs Armstrong's other becomes problematic.

Kurtz's other is marked by an inability to articulate ethical norms without some type of transcendent grounding, whether it is through revelation or mystical experience. Like Armstrong, his position depends on a historical argument regarding modernity, but his portrayal of modernity is positive. Kurtz welcomes the application of reason and scientific scrutiny to all areas of human life as it results in the continual liberation from superstition.

Kurtz certainly displays anticipatory confidence towards those of an open disposition. In this case, the confidence is displayed by Kurtz's negative a priori categorization of transcendentally grounded ethics.

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[181] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 647.
[182] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 649.

This confidence cannot survive the fact that both immanent and transcendent struggle to meet the same moral demands of modernity, and with equal difficulty. It is impossible to reduce contemporary violence to the continuing prevalence of transcendence, (i.e. religious organizations, or mystical superstitions) when it is obvious that immanently grounded agendas have used violence as a means to an end throughout the twentieth century; this would seem willfully ignorant.

To his credit, Kurtz does not reduce all moral failures to transcendentally grounded world-views. However, his works imply that a society entirely directed by the principles of eupraxophy would finally fulfill modern moral demands. This is Kurtz's utopian vision, which depends on the transformation of an other. In this case the other is finally convinced that his transcendental outlook is actually outdated and superstitious. However, if it is understood that both extremes of the immanent frame struggle to meet moral demands, then the other cannot be stereotyped nor transformed.

Both arguments are responses to a pluralist context where oppositional perspectives are common, where all are cross pressured between closure and transcendence. Entrenched positions like these must misrepresent an other in order to protect themselves from the reality of cross pressure. However, cross pressure is an inescapable feature of modern life. Once understood, it necessarily undermines spin of this kind.

3.2. Dialogical Identity and Overlapping Consensus

With spin exposed as unsustainable, people of oppositional backgrounds are forced to bypass preconceptions of one another. Others were perceived as defective, and it was not imperative to entertain their views. Now, however, there is a new sense of commonality in effect. This initiates a reconsideration of the other.

Explaining the effect of cross pressure negatively leaves an important question unaddressed. How should this new unencumbered dialogue proceed? For a better understanding of how Taylor imagines dialogical engagement, it is necessary to draw on key concepts from his earlier publications and relate them to *A Secular Age.*

Taylor exposes two common types of dialogue arising in contemporary Western societies where the ideal of authenticity is ubiquitous. Both dialectic modes seek to respect the expressive individual, whose self-fulfillment is a matter of being true to his own sense of what is really important.[183] This is a matter of living up to strong commitments that constitute a sense of identity. Failure to live up to these commitments leads to an identity crisis, and even undermines one's sense of selfhood.[184] So the importance of authenticity, or being true to one's identity, is universally recognized. However, the dialectic modes differ as each corresponds to an oppositional understanding of how identity is generated.

The first kind of dialogue assumes that the modern individual determines which commitments are most important through some sort of solitary contemplation. Taylor refers to this as the monological identity.[185]

The individual determines his own core commitments, and in the society of mutual benefit, it becomes vitally important to respect another's commitments. Respect of this kind is the result of a presumed equality. All individuals are equally capable of generating their own identity, and respect for the self-determination of equals excludes strong critiques of others' identities.[186]

The result is a dialogue characterized by "soft relativism" which allows us to get along at arm's length. It really does not matter how people are meeting universal moral demands, just as long as they are met. In this dialectic mode, "We need relationships to fulfill, but not to define, ourselves."[187]

Now Taylor argues that the monological identity is entirely erroneous, and his argument is convincing. Although identity is a matter of core commitments, these

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[183] Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity,* 14.

[184] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 27.

[185] Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 34.

[186] Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity,* 14.

[187] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition*,"* in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition,* edited by Amy Gutman (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 33.

commitments are expressed through language, which is produced and maintained by a community. One's identity, therefore, is derived communally through dialogue, or "webs of interlocution":

> A language only exists and is maintained within a language community… One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it… This is the sense in which one cannot be a self on one's own. I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors… A self exists only within what I call 'webs of interlocution'.[188]

Human life is inherently communal. This fact is so basic that its full significance is easily missed. Indeed, it is easily overlooked in a context where the demand of authenticity has become paradigmatic. There may be an overwhelming duty to remain true to character defining commitments, but these commitments only become important against a backdrop of significance. This backdrop is given to the individual through dialogue with significant interlocutors.

This very brief survey of Taylor's argument regarding dialogically generated identity indicates how meaningful engagement ought to proceed. Once life in the immanent frame is properly recognized as cross pressured, all are thrown into a common predicament. Despite the variety of transcendent or closed orientations, all are placed in a common normative background; everyone is recognized as a modern individual who must fulfill modern moral demands. Moreover, this is not a solitary endeavor. In order to accomplish this, all must collectively achieve "overlapping consensus":

> An ethics of dialogue respectful of different metaphysical and moral perspectives is the one best able to support the minimal political morality, or "overlapping consensus"… Under such an ethics of dialogue, citizens engage candidly in discussions about the foundations and orientations of their political community, using explanatory and justificatory language of their choice, while at the same time displaying sensitivity or empathy

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[188] Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* 35-36.

toward core convictions that are an integral part of their fellow citizens' moral identity.[189]

Dialogue predicated on relativism does not allow for the generation of overlapping consensus on critical issues. Relativism stifles public dialogue and assumes core convictions are easily relegated to the intimate sphere, which they are not. The fact is that all exist within a common social imaginary, one that stresses a morality geared towards the mutual benefit of individuals. And the individual only benefits when he is uninhibited, free to express and manifest his core convictions. Therefore, dialogue should aim to achieve overlapping consensus and respect the individual's right to self-expression. It is imperative that identities are fully recognized in order to determine how perspectives overlap.

This seems unproblematic in the public sphere, which Taylor defines as a "metatopical" discursive space insulated from the state.[190] But this sort of intimate dialogue becomes problematic within the political sphere. Here it is necessary for those who identify with the state to conduct themselves impartially. Failing to do so gives the impression that the state itself is aligned with a particular orientation. This would undermine state neutrality, which is necessary if the political system is to recognize equal moral value of all citizens.[191]

Within the political sphere, a popular solution involves a hushing of core commitments while governing by a commitment to certain processes:

> We all have views about the ends of life, about what constitutes a good life, which we and others ought to strive for. But we also acknowledge a commitment to deal fairly and equally with each other, regardless of how we conceive our ends. We might call this latter commitment "procedural," while commitments concerning the ends of life are "substantive." A liberal society is one that as a society adopts no particular substantive view about the ends of life. The society is, rather, united around a strong procedural commitment to treat people with equal respect.[192]

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[189] Maclure and Taylor, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience,* 107.

[190] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries,* 86.

[191] Maclure and Taylor, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience*, 20.

[192] Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 56.

Surely this commitment to procedure is an expression of soft relativism. Uniting around procedure and censoring substantive views assumes the strong commitments that constitute identity ought to remain extra-political. It also assumes these commitments can remain private, which is not always the case. In actuality, both the public and political spheres are forums where strong commitments are constantly presented and evaluated, even when they are conveyed through "neutral" languages. These are the discursive sites where one finds webs of interlocution.

The differentiation of procedural from substantive commitments raises another question. Is it better to proceed as if it were possible to keep core convictions extra-political in order to maintain state neutrality? In this scenario, voicing and recognizing core commitments would enable overlapping consensus in the public sphere, while these same commitments are left out of political discourse to maintain state neutrality.

Again, pursuing this as an ideal is problematic because procedural liberalism cannot claim to be neutral. In any multi-cultural or otherwise pluralist context, procedural or "difference-blind" principles are actually hegemonic principles of the cultural majority.[193] The core convictions that are barred from the political sphere are inevitably those of the cultural or ideological minority, who, now censored, become second-class citizens.

3.3. The Quebec Charter of Values

It has been argued that *A Secular Age* helps clarify contemporary discourse concerning belief, and this clarity necessarily results in meaningful engagement within the immanent frame. Recognition of cross pressure as an inescapable feature of modern life leads to a de-legitimization of spin, and initiates a move towards dialectic engagement with the other.

Now there is a final argument to be made concerning the two effects of *A Secular Age*. Taylor's argument is not merely clarifying and applicable. It is crucial to go a step

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[193] Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 43.

further here. Taylor has articulated a new and more comprehensive master narrative of modern secularity that concludes with the immanent frame. This conceptual schema captures sources of conflict that are not readily apparent, and it must be applied whenever meaningful dialogues and overlapping consensus are threatened. The immanent frame ought to be utilized as a bulwark of dialectic engagement.

As was argued in the previous chapter, spin is the most common threat to meaningful discourse within the immanent frame. However, it is not limited to voluntary associations like those created by Armstrong and Kurtz. This kind of entrenchment also occurs within the political sphere when a particular government is directed by a set of principles that are rigidly closed or transcendental.

When this occurs, the government is actually attempting to entrench itself against a section of the citizenry perceived as alien and vaguely threatening. Unsurprisingly, this can even result in the proposition of legislation that furthers their marginalization. Whenever the governing body acts in this manner, the marginalized are forced to censor any expression of core commitments in order to conform to the shift in political norms.

The state must remain neutral in order to prevent this kind of marginalization. However, the term "neutral" entails something unlike a more common understanding of state neutrality. Neutrality is commonly understood as a matter of disassociating the state with any particular religious association, so as to ensure equality of citizens in a pluralistic society.[194] This depiction of state neutrality certainly holds true, but in light of the immanent frame it begins to seem incomplete.

There is a real danger of the state coming under the influence of a particular religion. However, there is an equal danger of the state becoming too rigid in its enforcement of neutrality, to the point where those who identify with a particular transcendental orientation are marginalized within the political sphere. When this occurs, the state is censoring political discourse, and is effectively governing according to a closed interpretation of the immanent frame.

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[194] Maclure and Taylor, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience,* 9.

Of the two potential threats to state neutrality, the latter threat is more difficult to identify. A government directed by a closed view of the immanent frame easily passes itself off as "neutral" because it claims no allegiance to any particular religion. But in this scenario, the government's guiding principles are not really neutral at all. By shutting out those whose core commitments extend beyond the immanent goals of mutual benefit, the government fosters an environment that is hostile to anything but a closed interpretation of the immanent frame.

This resembles the same apprehension over Christian "fanaticism" that took hold during the eighteenth century, one that perceived strong religious commitments as incompatible with the society of mutual benefit:

> From the time of Gibbon, Voltaire, and Hume, we see the reaction which identifies in a strongly transcendent version of Christianity a danger for the goods of the modern moral order. Strong Christianity will demand allegiance to certain theological beliefs or ecclesiastical structures, and this will split a society which should be intent simply on securing mutual benefit. Or else, the demand that we reach for some higher good, beyond human flourishing, at best will distract us, at worst will become the basis for demands which will again endanger the well-oiled order of mutual benefit.[195]

The danger of government becoming hostile towards particular orientations in the immanent frame is not hypothetical. This danger has become quite real, and it offers the opportunity to further demonstrate the importance of *A Secular Age*. The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to discussing the recently defeated Quebec Charter of Values as a piece of legislation informed by a closed interpretation of the immanent frame.

This is a novel presentation of the Charter of Values. Although Taylor publicly denounced the charter as discriminatory, he did not relate the charter to the immanent frame.[196] Consequently, some aspects of the charter have remained unexamined.

Taylor's criticism of the Charter of Values is unsurprising because the charter clashes with some key directives that he and Gerard Bouchard propose in the

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[195] Taylor, *A Secular Age,* 546.

[196] Charles Taylor and Daniel Turp, "Secularism, Religion, and Societal Values," (Lecture, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, October 3rd, 2013).

Commission on Reasonable Accommodation.[197] In fact, any analysis of the charter that does not take into account its relation to the Commission would be incomplete.

The Commission report contains two arguments that are most relevant here. The first is an affirmation of "open" secularism first articulated in the Proulx Report. Open secularism recognizes that the state must maintain neutrality, but also acknowledges "the importance for some people of the spiritual dimension of existence and consequently, the protection of freedom of conscience and religion."[198] In this case, the protection of freedom of religion is a matter of ensuring that individuals are free to express core commitments.

Ensuring freedom of religion is not merely a matter of protecting the individual's right to hold a particular belief espoused in a religious tradition. Rather, there is both a moral and legal obligation to ensure the freedom to hold beliefs, and to manifest one's religious commitments.[199] Failure to do so would result in the infliction of moral harm.

It appears that proponents of open secularism face a dilemma. What if an employee of a public institution wishes to manifest his religious affiliation? They are unwilling to inflict a moral harm by prohibiting the manifestation of religious commitments, yet they are equally unwilling to compromise state neutrality. Here the solution is simple. The burden of neutrality is placed entirely on the institution, and not the individual working within it.[200]

The institution's neutrality depends on the deliverance of a service in an impartial manner. As a representative of the public institution, the employee is obliged to conduct himself in a manner congruent with this impartiality. Critics of open secularism argue that the display of religious symbols precludes the public employee's impartiality, but the proponent of open secularism is not convinced. Those in favour of open secularism have confidence in the public employee's ability to work impartially while manifesting a core

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[197] Gerard Bouchard and Charles Taylor, *Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation.* Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, 2008.

[198] Bouchard and Taylor, *Building the Future,* 140.

[199] Bouchard and Taylor, *Building the Future,* 176.

[200] Maclure and Taylor, *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience,* 39.

conviction. This implies a corresponding imperative for the public; everyone ought to "get over" the presence of religious symbols in the public sphere and evaluate the public employee on his conduct, not his appearance.

The second argument follows from the differentiation of institutions and individuals. An individual should be able to request special accommodation from a public institution of employment in order to express core commitments as long as it does not impose undue financial or administrative hardship that would infringe on the rights of others, social security, and public order.[201]

The Charter of Values, originally introduced as Bill 60 in the Quebec National Assembly, sought to challenge what had become status quo by denying the right of reasonable accommodation.[202] It asserts that "public bodies are the bodies and institutions, and persons together with their personnel," and therefore, "in the exercise of their functions, personnel members of public bodies must not wear objects such as headgear, clothing, jewelry, or other adornments which, by their conspicuous nature, overtly indicate a religious affiliation."[203]

In response, Taylor has publicly challenged the equation of public employees with institutions, bluntly stating that "Hydro-Quebec isn't Hydro-Catholic, Hydro-Muslim, Hydro-Atheist, but employees are individuals… they are free."[204] The equation of the individual and the institution seems to have become the key area of contention, separating the charter's supporters from its critics.

This chapter has taken a different approach by suggesting that the charter is informed closed world spin. The charter contains two implications that exemplify closed world assumptions. First, the charter implies an incompatibility between the purely

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[201] Bouchard and Taylor, *Building the Future,* 290.

[202] Bill 60, *Charter affirming the values of State secularism and religious neutrality and of equality between women and men, and providing a framework for accommodation requests,* First Sess., 40th Legislature of the Quebec National Assembly, November 7, 2013.

[203] Bill 60, 6.

[204] Ingrid Peritz, "Critics call Quebec's proposed ban on religious headwear 'Putinesque'," *The Globe and Mail*, Aug. 20 2013, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/parti-quebecois-under-fire-over-proposal-to-ban-religious-symbols/article13869072/.

immanent state and transcendentally framed identities, though arguing this explicitly was never a viable option because it would have appeared too discriminatory. Secondly, the charter implies that transcendentally grounded moralities are superfluous within the society of mutual benefit, and can be pushed towards the private sphere without compromising freedom of conscience.

The charter views the public employee who manifests his religious commitment as a threat to state neutrality. While this was never argued outright, it is plainly the case. If it were not, there would be no need to propose such legislation in the first place. This presumed incompatibility is caused by a misunderstanding of the transcendental identity and its core commitments.

Those who identify with a religious tradition do so, in part, by framing their ethical outlook through appeals to this religion. In other words, their conduct is informed by a commitment to rules they associate with their religion. When religious symbols are worn, these symbols may imply some moral sources that extend beyond the purely immanent goals of the secular state. For example, some may refrain from violence because it violates sacred commands, not, primarily, because it violates certain secular laws. People of various outlooks find myriad ways to satisfy moral norms, and these moral sources are definitive aspects of their identities.

Therefore it is reasonable to assume that people wearing religious symbols possess moral sources that transcend the immanent frame. Yet it seems that proponents of the charter are going a step further. They perceive these religious adornments as a sign of transcendent outlooks that somehow threaten the society of mutual benefit.

The question is whether these other outlooks constitute a threat. The occurrence of what could be called "religiously inspired violence" suggests they can. The charter is not erroneous because it anticipates a potential incompatibility between transcendent moral sources and the laws of mutual benefit. In fact, in extreme cases, people of all faiths have transgressed the secular laws of mutual benefit to serve some other end. But this does not justify the categorical enforcement of censorship on vast segments of a population. This position assumes that religiously motivated violence is more a rule than

an exception, which is plainly not the case. Moreover, this position forgets that modern individuals live within a shared normative background. Every member of the secular state lives with a common set of ethical expectations corresponding to exclusively human goods, and these are appreciable by closed and transcendent types alike. There is no strong justification for the argument that transcendental identities are incompatible or pose a threat to the purely immanent goals of the state.

The charter assumes that secular society can function while core commitments of all types remain a private matter. Accordingly, religious commitments of the transcendental identity can be relegated to the private sphere without compromising freedom of conscience of those being censored. It is relatively easy to see how the charter fails to comprehend the dialogically generated identity and the harm inflicted when core commitments are not recognized by others. It is less obvious how the charter devalues those whose core commitments extend beyond a closed language.

The society of mutual benefit is maintained by a set of ethical norms that can be articulated without appeals to anything beyond the immanent frame. By insisting that people refrain from wearing objects that indicate religious affiliation, the charter is effectively treating these core commitments as unnecessary to the functioning of society. These symbols differentiate individuals and obstruct one's ability to co-operate according to the purely immanent norms of mutual benefit. The willingness to undermine the individual's right to manifest a core commitment clearly demonstrates how open perspectives can be seen as superfluous.

So far the charter has been described negatively in terms of what it threatens, but it also affirms a political culture of neutrality.[205] It recognizes that the public employee is committed to substantive goods, but these must be kept a private matter: "In the exercise of their functions, personnel members of public bodies must maintain religious neutrality."[206] The charter is committed to processes of equality that are depicted as neutral, but the procedural commitments it espouses are not neutral at all. The culture of neutrality places an asymmetrical hardship on public employees of an open disposition.

[205] Bill 60, 6.
[206] Bill 60, 6.

Public employees of a closed perspective are not forced to undergo the same self-censorship, which results in moral harm.

A push for this sort of procedural neutrality could ultimately undermine society's ability to achieve overlapping consensus. Overlapping consensus depends on meaningful dialogue where core commitments are expressed freely. Only through recognition of others can one discover if ethics overlap. In other words, overlapping consensus is not attainable by accident. Individuals must come to know one another and what they stand for if they are to know that they share some mutual commitment despite their varied backgrounds. Overlapping consensus is only possible once others become recognizable.

But the charter presumes an incompatibility between those who derive moral sources within the immanent frame and those who appeal to something beyond the modern moral order of mutual benefit. Censoring those of a transcendent orientation implies that they, and the traditions they espouse, are unnecessary or unwelcome within state apparatus. And it would not be surprising if certain cultural minorities began to feel unwelcome not only as employees of public bodies, but within the entire public sphere.

A Secular Age helps clarify what kinds of people are marginalized and the greater societal ramifications of their marginalization. The Charter of Values and similar legislation would alienate many, and render overlapping consensus unattainable. Public employees must be allowed to manifest core commitments in public, provided these manifestations do not inhibit their ability to conduct themselves in a neutral manner. Relegating these core commitments to the private sphere would lead society away from overlapping consensus, and towards fragmentation and animosity.

Conclusion

Demonstrating the pragmatic value of *A Secular Age* is an interesting challenge. In one respect this demonstration is nothing more than an answer to an implied question: does Taylor's argument contain this kind of value or not? Hopefully this argument is seen as a simple answer in the affirmative.

Yet exposing this value is a complicated task. First of all, pragmatic value needs to be defined. This thesis explains the term by appealing to William James' description of pragmatic thought. For James, a thought's "sole significance" is in the practical effects it produces, which suggests that a thought ought to be evaluated in light of these effects.[207] Taylor's argument is valuable if its effects can be shown to be beneficial.

Yet an argument is only pragmatically valuable if its application is appropriate. In other words, value is partially determined by context. An understanding of the context is vital if the value of *A Secular Age* is to be properly understood. Therefore it is necessary to provide some original research into popular arguments and agendas alongside the Charter of Values to better understand the context in question. This original research into popular arguments also proves that the immanent frame has captured a set of background assumptions that determine how discourses will proceed.

These background ideas are the structural sources of entrenchment. Oppositional perspectives are reactions to the immanent frame, particularly modern individuality and a set of moral norms corresponding with mutual benefit. Various polemics that may seem unrelated become appreciable as oppositional reactions to a common frame. This has been referred to throughout this thesis as the "clarifying effect."

This new appreciation for the immanent frame and its effects results in an overcoming of entrenchment. Once it recognized that all are cross-pressured between

[207] William James, "What Pragmatism Means", 25.

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immanence and transcendence within a common moral frame, the sort of "spin" that enables discursive entrenchment exemplified by the Charter of Values is invalidated.

Together, these are the two effects that constitute the pragmatic value of *A Secular Age*. This thesis has made use of the immanent frame as an explanatory concept that reveals the obscure background ideas constraining contemporary discourse, the structural relationship between many common perspectives concerning religion and secularism, the structural sources of entrenchment, and how this entrenchment must give way to a relatively uninhibited dialogue.

Moreover, it is clear from the Charter of Values and the reaction it provoked that secularism is already treated pragmatically, though this term is never employed to describe this kind of understanding. The charter mentions secularism but offers no substantial definition. Reaction to the charter was similarly limited. Nobody cared to re-examine the meaning of secularism as an abstract concept. Instead, all parties were exclusively concerned with its effects.

In light of this, mainstream approaches to secularism offer very little; the perfect definition of secularization as an abstract concept is of little actual worth. *A Secular Age* becomes even more valuable because, unlike the mainstream approach, it relates different conceptualizations of secularism to the contemporary background picture.

Finally, the project of proving this pragmatic value is all the more necessary because the possible changes it could effect have remained unaddressed. Taylor comes closest to this in his later publication *Dilemmas and Connections,* where he explains how assumptions regarding others are overcome, and the positive effects of this achievement:

> This will happen when we allow ourselves to be challenged, interpellated by what is different in their lives, and this challenge will bring about two connected changes: we will see our peculiarity for the first time, as a formulated fact about us and not simply a taken-for-granted feature of the human condition as such; and at the same time, we will perceive the corresponding feature of their life-form undistorted. These two changes are indissolubly linked; you cannot have one without the other… Our understanding of others will now be improved through this correction of a previous distortion, but it is unlikely to be perfect. The possible ways in

which our background could enframe them distortively cannot be enumerated.[208]

Taylor is confident that spin is deconstructed through genuine encounters with others, and that this needs to be an ongoing process. Dialogue upsets preconceptions of others, and these same preconceptions inform one's general perspective. Once the preconception of the other is challenged, the unformulated background of which they were key figures is also necessarily challenged.

Dilemmas and Connections demonstrates how the other becomes knowable through dialogue, and how this reveals the peculiarity of one's own views. Yet how one gets to the point where he "allows himself to be challenged" by the other remains unclear.[209] This thesis contends that the answer is to be found in *A Secular Age*. Moreover, propositions like the Charter of Values are opportunities to re-examine how and where manifestations of entrenchment come to exist, and how they can be overcome. *A Secular Age* is particularly well suited to this end.

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[208] Charles Taylor, "Understanding the Other: A Gadamerian View on Conceptual Schemes," in *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2011), 29.
[209] Charles Taylor, "Understanding the Other", 29.

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