II

A Secular Age: Dawn or Twilight?

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Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* offers the best analytical, phenomenological, and genealogical account we have of our modern, secular condition. By "best" I mean that it is simultaneously the most comprehensive, nuanced, and complex account I know. Analytically, it explains with distinct clarity the structural interlocking constellation of the cosmic, social, and moral orders that constitute the self-sufficient immanent frame within which we are constrained to live and experience our lives, secular as well as religious. All three orders—the cosmic, the social, and the moral—are understood as purely immanent secular orders, devoid of transcendence, and thus functioning *etsi Deus non daretur.* It is this phenomenological experience that, according to Taylor, constitutes our age paradigmatically as a secular one, irrespective of the extent to which people living in this age may still hold religious or theistic beliefs. Indeed, Taylor's primary interest is not to offer a sociological account of secularity in terms of standard theories of secularization, which measure the changing (mostly falling) rates of religious beliefs and practices in modern contemporary societies.

Taylor is primarily interested in offering a phenomenological account of the secular "conditions" of belief and of the "preontological" context of understanding, in order to explain the change from a Christian society around 1500 CE in which belief in God was unchallenged and unproblematic, indeed

"naive" and taken for granted, to a post-Christian society today in which belief in God not only is no longer axiomatic but becomes increasingly problematic, so that even those who adopt an "engaged" standpoint as believers are forced to adopt simultaneously a "disengaged" standpoint, in which they experience reflectively their own belief as an option among many others—one, moreover, requiring a explicit justification. Secularity, by contrast, tends to become increasingly the default option, which can be naively experienced as natural and thus no longer in need of justification.

This phenomenological experience, as merely immanent, is what in turn serves to ground the phenomenological experience of exclusive humanism as the positive self-sufficient and self-limiting affirmation of human flourishing and as the critical rejection of transcendence beyond human flourishing as self-denial and self-defeating. Moreover, intrinsic to this phenomenological experience is a modern "stadial consciousness," inherited from the Enlightenment, which understands this anthropocentric change in the conditions of belief as a process of maturation and growth, as a "coming of age," and as progressive emancipation. Modern unbelief is not simply a condition of absence of belief, nor merely indifference. It is a historical condition that requires the perfect tense, "a condition of 'having overcome' the irrationality of belief" (*SA*, 269). As Taylor indicates, precisely "the superiority of our present outlook over other earlier forms of understanding is part of what defines the advance of the present stage over all earlier ones" (289). This historical consciousness turns the very idea of going back to a surpassed condition into an unthinkable intellectual regression. It is, in his words, "the ratchet at the end of the anthropocentric shift, which makes it (near) impossible to go back on it. This powerful understanding of an inescapable impersonal order, uniting social imaginary, epistemic ethic, and historical consciousness, becomes one of the (in a sense unrecognized) *idées forces* of the modern age" (289–290).

For that very reason, all analytical and phenomenological accounts of modernity are irremediably also grand narratives, indeed are always embedded in some genealogical account. Taylor's account is in this respect no different, and thus fully within the historical consciousness of modernity. Actually, it is the richness and complexity of his genealogical account, in obvious opposition to the postmodern illusion of being able to free ourselves from grand narratives, that make Taylor's analysis of secular modernity so com-

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pelling. Taylor's account is superior precisely insofar as it is able to integrate successfully the valid insights of most of the competing genealogical accounts.

One may group the genealogical accounts of modernity into four basic types: (1) the triumphant secularist and anthropocentric progressive stories of enlightenment and emancipation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms; (2) the inverse negative philosophies of history, counter-Enlightenment narratives, and mainly Catholic traditionalist defenses of a lost normative age; (3) the positive, mainly Protestant postmillennial identifications of Western modernity and Christian civilization that tend to interpret secular modernity as a process of internal secularization and progressive institutionalization of Christian principles and norms; and (4) their opposite, Nietzschean-derived critical genealogies of modernity, which question the legitimacy of the modern secular age and its disciplinary and civilizing project precisely because of its bastard Christian lineage. Taylor acknowledges and incorporates the valid insights of each of those accounts but faults them for their partial, one-sided focus and unidirectional teleology. His complex account, by contrast, is full of zigzags, unexpected turns, and unintended results.

Secularist genealogies of modernity, which derive from the Enlightenment critique of religion in all its cognitive, ideologico-political, and moral-aesthetic dimensions, are versions of what Taylor calls "subtraction theories." They are problematic not so much in their self-assertive humanist claims and positive evaluation of the progressive achievements of "our" secular age, which Taylor repeatedly acknowledges, but precisely insofar as secularist accounts are blind to the Christian roots of the entire process of secularization, to the repeated Christian dynamics of disciplinary inner-worldly transformation, and to the Christian moral energies that have fed much of the process of modern reform. Taylor challenges secularist prejudices that tend to understand the secular as merely the space left behind when this-worldly reality is emptied of religion or to view unbelief as resulting simply from the progress of science and rational inquiry. Similarly, he argues that exclusive humanism could not simply result from the disenchantment of the cosmos and the distancing of a deist God from a mechanistically run universe. Its moral sources, benevolence, and universal concern had to be created, discovered, or at least relocated and refashioned from its Christian roots in agape. Modern progres-

sive philosophies of history are precisely problematic in viewing secular modernity as the last triumphant episode in a universal story of human development and secularization, while failing to recognize the particular contingent historical origins of the process in Latin Christendom.

Yet Taylor also wants to distinguish his account from all Catholic intellectual deviation stories and from all Protestant identifications of modernity as Christian. Intellectual deviation stories can clarify some of the theological connections between the critique of "realism" and the rise of nominalism, possibilism, voluntarism, and their connections with the rise of mechanistic science, ontic dualism, and modern instrumental reason—in brief, with the whole process of "disenchantment." But such a genealogy, anchored as it is in intellectual history, leaves out the entire reform master narrative, which is so central to Taylor's account. Reform also begins within Latin Christendom and is identified with "the thrust to complete the Axial revolution" and to end "the balance and complementarity between pre- and post-Axial elements in all higher civilizations." For Taylor, "Reform not only disenchants, but disciplines and re-orders life and society" (*SA,* 774).

In turn, the sanguine identification of Protestant Christianity and modern civilization, which one finds in German versions of *Kulturprotestantismus* and in British colonial civilizing projects, and which still lives on in contemporary versions of the American civil religion and of imperial manifest destiny, rightly direct attention to the close connection between Christian reformation, demanding "that everyone be a *real, 100 percent* Christian," and all modern processes of disciplinary and civilizing reform. Yet, while acknowledging the "invaluable gains," Taylor's narrative pays equal attention to the grievous losses, the Christian self-mutilation, and the homogenizing conformity that accompanies the triumph of secularity and of the immanent frame. Taylor warns us to be equally wary of all narratives of simple, cost-free suppression and supersession, whether narrated by Christians in the form of "God's pedagogy" or by protagonists of the Enlightenment in the form of the "ascent of man." Taylor's account has "no place for unproblematic breaks with a past which is simply left behind us" (772).

There are also clear affinities between Taylor's account and the neo-Nietzschean critiques of modernity, which Taylor calls "immanent counter-Enlightenment" and which can be interpreted as a revolt against the allegiance to the moral order and the affirmation of ordinary life that exclusive

humanism inherited from the Christian tradition. It is, in Taylor's words, "the revolt from within unbelief, as it were, against the primacy of life" (*SA,* 372). Taylor can empathize with the rebellion against the exclusive humanism of modern culture. But insofar as the proponents of exclusive humanism reject any ontically grounded understanding of transcendence, they actually serve to reinforce further the immanent frame that Taylor aims precisely to destabilize.

Nieztschean-derived genealogical accounts of Western modernity that question the legitimacy of modernity precisely because of its association with Christianity tend to provoke in turn passionate defenses of the legitimacy of the modern secular age and its exclusive humanism, as in Blumenberg's thesis of human non-Christian self-assertion. Those in turn provoke the spirited defense of Christian apologists, who see the superiority of Christianity and Christian civilization precisely in its virtuous association with secular modernity, which in turn provokes the anti-modern critiques of Christian or Aristotelian traditionalists, and so on in circular fashion.[1] It is one of the virtues of Taylor's complex genealogical account that it is able to cut through the whole debate, indeed to transcend it, recognizing valid insights and uncritical blindness in each of the positions. This is the case not only because, as Robert Bellah points out in Chapter 1, Taylor's account is devoid of polemic and is generous hermeneutically in trying to understand all possible positions and to see virtue in all of them.

More importantly, he sees in the polemic responses and relations to one another an illustration of the kind of destabilization that is built into the contingent historical process of secularization he is trying to reconstruct in all its complexity. Such recognition may help, or so Taylor hopes, change our picture of modern culture. "Instead of seeing it as the scene of a two-sided battle, between 'tradition,' especially religious tradition, and secular humanism, we might rather see it as a kind of free-for-all, the scene of a three-cornered —perhaps ultimately, a four cornered—battle" (*SA,* 374). Taylor's own position in this battle and ultimately the thrust behind his compelling account of the modern immanent frame is to show the destabilizing cracks and the ungrounded and unreflexive certainty of exclusive humanism, in the hope of

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1 Cf. Karl Löwith, Hans Blumenberg, Ernst Troeltsch, Talcott Parsons, Alisdair McIntyre, and John Milbank.

creating some openings for transcendence beyond human flourishing. The masterful account of the contemporary taken-for-granted conditions of unbelief developed in the first parts of the book (Parts I–IV) has the function precisely of creating an open space for the exploration of the contemporary "conditions of belief" in the final part of the book, where Taylor wants to destabilize the immanent frame and the unquiet frontiers of modernity by looking at its intrinsic cross-pressures and dilemmas and by illuminating the possibilities of conversion. If the first sections of the book reveal the analytical, hermeneutic, and narrative gifts of a philosopher who can help us as few others can to understand our secular social imaginaries, the final part reveals the romantic soul of Christian love, the will to belief that accompanies the hope for eternity, and the utopian thirst for incarnated divinization and transcendence beyond mere human flourishing.

Let me reiterate, therefore, the beginning paragraph of this chapter and address the critical interrogation of the title. Taylor's *A Secular Age* offers the best analytical, phenomenological, and genealogical account we have of "our" modern, secular condition. But how is Taylor to be remembered: as the definitive philosopher of the immanent frame and of exclusive humanism at the moment of its definitive triumph, or rather as the prophet of a dawning postsecular age? Clearly he aims to destabilize the immanent frame that shapes so much of our social imaginary. But is he able to offer such a definitive account only because his philosophical vision stands at the twilight of an age already anticipating a new dawn?

Ultimately, the crucial question one must pose is, who are the "we" of "our" secular age? Taylor makes clear in the very first paragraph of the book that he has in mind "the 'we' who live in the West, or perhaps Northwest, or otherwise put, the North Atlantic world—although secularity extends also partially, and in different ways, beyond this world" (*SA,* 1). Such an opening raises in my view two important questions, which I would like to explore as critical interrogations directed at Taylor's account. Both derive, no doubt, from my professional sociological bias, but they are nonetheless unavoidable as fundamental questions. Given Taylor's unitary phenomenological account of "our" contemporary "condition of belief," or rather unbelief, how is one to account sociologically for the radical bifurcation in the religious situation today between Western societies on both sides of the North Atlantic—that is, between the radical secularity of European societies, which indeed appears

to match perfectly Taylor's phenomenological account, and the still predominant condition of religious belief among the immense majority of ordinary people that one finds in the United States?

The question of the relation between the two patently different phenomenological and sociological accounts can also be reframed inversely, so that one may ask, given the overwhelming sociological empirical evidence of the persistent and widespread condition of religious belief in the United States, is Taylor's phenomenological account of the uniform condition of unbelief across the North Atlantic world credible? In other words, who are the "we" of Taylor's phenomenological account? Does it exclude the immense majority of the population of the United States, who appear to live within the same immanent frame as modern Europeans yet are unlikely to recognize as their own the condition of exclusive humanism so clearly depicted by Taylor? No doubt there is an important and vocal minority of "secular humanists" in the United States. But the overwhelming majority of Americans are likely to view themselves as "religious" humanists rather than as secular ones. I do not think we are dealing here merely with a question of semantics. What is at stake is the very credibility of the transformation in the conditions of belief that anchors Taylor's entire narrative, from a condition around 1500 when belief in God was basically axiomatic to the current condition in the year 2000 when unbelief appears to be rather the default, almost natural condition. Except in the United States, of course, where historians and sociologists of religion never tire of pointing out that the immense majority of the population appears to live "awash in a sea of faith," as captured in the suggestive title of Jon Butler's history of American religion.[2] So how does one account for the old nagging question of American exceptionalism, and how does it affect our narratives of secular modernity?

Taylor is well aware of the problem, to the point where one may be tempted to argue that his more sociological "narratives of secularization" in Part IV are introduced precisely in order to counter possible critiques. He actually offers some important clues for what could be turned into a convincing sociological explanation of American exceptionalism. First of all, an important part of the explanation must certainly be the crucial historical fact that

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2 Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).

there was no United States in 1500, and therefore the people in the United States did not have to overcome either the established ecclesiastical institutions or the paleo-Durkheimian conditions of belief of the old European ancient regimes in any of its two main forms: in the unitary form of pre-Reformation medieval Christendom or in its post-Reformation Westphalian arrangement of territorialized confessional absolutist states.

Second, an important corollary of this primary fact must be the fact that the United States was born as a brand-new modern secular republic and that its very foundation coincides with "the age of mobilization," in the sense that religious mobilization and political mobilization are simultaneous and cofoundational in the Christian secular republic, so that the American Enlightenment and the American civil religion are for all practical purposes devoid of the kind of anti-Christian animus that occupies such a central place in Taylor's genealogical account of exclusive humanism. Indeed, one might ask whether the very term "neo-Durkheimian dispensation" is appropriate in a case like the United States, when there is not a previous stage of paleo-Durkheimian dispensation, of which it is supposed to be a transformed mutation—that is, when the very Christianization of the American people is the historical outcome of the religious-political mobilization that accompanies all the Great Awakenings and all the sociohistorical transformations of American democracy.

Third, one has to take into account the fact that what Taylor calls "the age of authenticity," which in his account emerges around 1960, after the exhaustion of "the age of mobilization" (1800–1950), in the case of the United States, at least in the religious sphere, should be dated much earlier. The age of authenticity, no doubt, owes much to the romantic reaction that Taylor has so persistently and distinctly illuminated for us throughout his work and that became democratized throughout the North American world with the countercultural movement and youth rebellions of the 1960s. One could legitimately argue that it constitutes possibly the turning point in the radical secularization of modern Western societies, certainly Western European ones. Yet in the case of the United States, in the sphere of religion, the age of authenticity may be said to have been already present and operative during the Second Great Awakening, certainly in the Burned Over District of upstate New York and in the myriad of utopian communities and radical spiritual experiments in all directions, which once again Butler has appropriately

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and suggestively characterized as the "spiritual hothouse" of antebellum America.[3]

But, one may further ask, if the stage theory of "paleo-," "neo-," and "post-" Durkheimian social orders does not fit so neatly the historical experience of the United States, could this constitute an almost insuperable impediment to the widespread acceptance of an stadial historical consciousness that views unbelief as the quasi-natural developmental result of a kind of secular coming of age and of adult maturation? Moreover, without the stadial consciousness of the superiority of unbelief, perhaps one also lacks the ratchet effect of the anthropocentric shift to exclusive humanism, so that what Taylor calls the nova and even supernova effects of the age of authenticity have always been operative in the United States, but only to multiply to the *n*th degree the myriad options of belief rather than those of unbelief.

One could turn the European theories of American exceptionalism upside-down and view the historical process of secularization of Latin Christendom not as the general rule but rather as the one truly exceptional process, unlikely to be reproduced anywhere else in the world with the same sequential arrangement and the corresponding stadial consciousness. It does not mean that one has to accept the now emerging theories of European exceptionalism, promoted by Peter Berger and Grace Davie, according to which secularity is a singular European phenomenon unknown in the rest of the world, other than among Westernized elites, so that the global condition is rather one of desecularization of the world and religious revival. There are plenty of indications of secularity in Japanese and Chinese cultures, for instance. What they lack, however, is precisely the stadial consciousness, and without it, one may ask, can the immanent frame of the secular modern order have the same phenomenological effect in the conditions of belief and unbelief in non-Western societies? Without a stadial consciousness, can "this powerful understanding of an inescapable impersonal order, uniting social imaginary, epistemic ethic, and historical consciousness, become one of the (in a sense unrecognized) *idées forces* of the modern age" also in non-Western societies (*SA,* 289–290)? Or will it rather be recognized for what it obviously is, namely a particular Western Christian process of secularization without the same force in non-Christian societies, which did not undergo a similar

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3 Ibid.

process of historical development but instead always confronted Western secular modernity from their first encounter with European colonialism as "the other"?

I would like to look at the possible ways in which this decentering of the Western European experience, this provincializing of Europe that accompanies our global age, may serve also to destabilize even further Taylor's secular age, without necessarily opening new paths to novel forms of transcendence. This question is particularly justified as Taylor places the whole process of Western secularization as a radicalization of the great disembedding of the individual from the sacred cosmos and from society initiated by the axial revolutions. In the context of a general theory of "religious" evolution, one may understand this process as a redrawing of boundaries between sacred and profane, transcendence and immanence, and religious and secular. It should be obvious that these three dichotomous classificatory schemes do not fit neatly within one another. The sacred tends to be immanent in preaxial societies, transcendence does not need to be religious in some axial civilizations, and obviously much secular reality (the nation, citizenship, inalienable rights to life and freedom) can be sacred in the modern secular age, while individualized and privatized religiosity may lose its public sacred character.

Sacred and profane, following Durkheim, would be a general dichotomous classificatory scheme of all reality, characteristic of all preaxial human societies, encompassing within one single order what later will be distinguished as three separate realms: the cosmic, the social, and the moral. All reality—what we later will learn to distinguish as the gods or spirits, nature and cosmic forces, humans and other animal species, and the political, social, and moral orders—is integrated into a single order of things according precisely to the dichotomous classificatory system of sacred and profane. The entire system, moreover, is an immanent "this-worldly" one, if one is allowed to use anachronistically another dichotomous category that will only emerge precisely with the axial revolutions. What defines the axial revolutions is precisely the introduction of a new classificatory scheme that results from the emergence of "transcendence," of an order of being beyond the entire this-worldly reality, which now can serve as a transcendent principle to evaluate, regulate, and possibly transform this-worldly reality. As in the case of the Platonic world of "ideas," or the Confucian reformulation of the Chinese *tao,* transcendence is not necessarily "religious," nor does all "religion" need to

become transcendent, if we are allowed once again to use anachronistically another dichotomous classificatory category, "religious/secular," which will only emerge with modernity.

To return to Taylor's analysis, what all axial revolutions introduce is transcendent paths, individual and collective, of salvation, redemption, or moral perfection "beyond human flourishing." Not all axial paths entail a refashioning or transformation of the world or the social order; in some cases, indeed, as in Buddhism, it may entail a radical devaluation and rejection of all reality and a flight from this world, switching now to a Weberian language. But all of them, in Taylor's analysis, will entail some refashioning of "the self," who is now "called" to live (or perhaps to deny herself) according to some transcendent norm beyond human flourishing. In the case of the radical transcendent monotheism introduced by the prophets in ancient Israel, the axial revolution entails a radical desacralization of all cosmic, natural, and social reality, of all creatures, gods, and idols, for the sake of the exclusive sacralization of Yahweh, the transcendent creator God.

The religious/secular dichotomy is a particular medieval Christian version of the more general axial dichotomous classification of transcendent and immanent orders of reality. Unique to the medieval system of Latin Christendom is the institutionalization of an ecclesiastical-sacramental system of mediation, the Church, between the transcendent City of God and the immanent City of Man. The Church can play this role precisely because it partakes of both realities. As *ecclesia invisibilis,* "the communion of the saints," the Christian Church is a "spiritual" reality, part of the eternal transcendent City of God. As *ecclesia visibilis,* the Christian Church is in the saeculum, a "temporal" reality, and thus part of the immanent City of Man. The modern Western process of secularization that culminates in "a secular age" is a particular historical dynamic that makes sense only as a response and reaction to the medieval Latin Christian system of classification of all reality into "spiritual" and "temporal," "religious" and "secular." It ends with the establishment of the secular immanent frame as the single reality, within which religion and spirituality will have to find its place. But it begins—and this is the crucial point of Taylor's master reform narrative—as a process of internal secular reform within Latin Christendom, as an attempt to "spiritualize" the temporal and to bring the religious life out of the monasteries into the saeculum, and thus, literally, to secularize the religious. The process of spiri-

tualization of temporal-secular reality entails also a process of interiorization of religion, and thus a certain deritualization, desacralization, or demagicization of religion, which in the particular case of Christianity takes naturally the form of desacramentalizing and deecclesializing religion.

The repeated attempts at Christian reform of the saeculum, that is, to Christianize the immanent City of Man, began with the papal revolution and continued with the emergence of the spiritual orders of mendicant and preaching friars bent on Christianizing the growing medieval towns and cities and with the emergence of lay Christian communities of brothers and sisters, brotherhoods and sisterhoods, committed to a life of Christian perfection in the saeculum, in the world. These medieval movements of Christian reform already established the basic patterns of secularization which would later be radicalized by the accumulative processes of secularization brought by the Protestant Reformation and all subsequent modern civilizing and reform processes, which ushered in the modern revolution.

The general dynamic of secularization follows a consistent effort to bridge the gap, ultimately to eliminate altogether the dichotomous division, between the religious and the secular. But this basic pattern of secularization takes two different historical paths. The Protestant path, which will be radicalized in Anglo-Saxon societies, and particularly in the United States, takes the form of breaking the boundaries, "the monastery walls," between the religious and the secular, making the religious secular and the secular religious. It takes also a form of radical desacramentalization which will assume an extreme form with the radical sects in their attempt to dismantle all ecclesiastical institutions and to turn the ecclesia into a secular association of visible "saints." The Latin-Catholic path, by contrast, will take the form of laicization, and is basically marked by a civil-ecclesiastical and laic-clerical antagonistic dynamic. Thus the central role attained by anticlericalism in the process. It maintains rigidly the boundaries between the religious and the secular, but pushes those boundaries into the margins, containing, privatizing, and marginalizing everything religious. When it breaks the monastery walls, it will be not to bring the religious into the secular world but to laicize them, dissolving and emptying their religious content and making the religious persons, monks and nuns, civil and laic before forcing them into the world. This could well serve as the basic metaphor for all subtraction narratives of secular modernity.

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Even within Western secular modernity one can find, therefore, two very different patterns of secularization, one could even say two different types of modernity. This would be the basic underlying reality behind the different European and American patterns of secularization, although one could also discern, following David Martin's analysis, a multiplicity of patterns within a common frame of secularization of the various types of ancient regimes, which emerged in Europe out of the dissolution of the medieval system of Latin Christendom and the formation of the Westphalian system of territorial states. According to Taylor's analysis, however, all of them can be viewed as variables within the same basic post-Christian pattern of Western secularization. All of them are embedded within a common immanent frame and within the same secular age.

It just happened, of course, as we are only now becoming increasingly aware, that this particular historical pattern of Western Christian secularization became globalized through the very particular historical process of European colonial expansion. As a result the immanent frame became in a certain sense globalized, at least in terms of certain crucial aspects of the cosmic order through the globalization of science and technology, certain crucial aspects of the institutional social order of the state, the market, and the public sphere, and certain crucial aspects of the moral order through the globalization of individual human rights. But the process of European colonial expansion encountered other postaxial civilizations with very different social imaginaries, which often had their own established patterns of reform in accordance with their own particular axial civilizational principles and norms. The outcomes that will result from these long historical dynamics of intercivilizational encounters, conflicts, borrowings, accommodations, and *aggiornamentos* are likely to change from place to place, from time to time, and from civilization to civilization.

As a critical comment to Taylor's genealogical account, one could argue with Peter van der Veer that the very pattern of Western secularization cannot be fully understood if one ignores the crucial significance of the colonial encounter in European developments.[4] Indeed, the best of postcolonial analysis has shown how every master reform narrative and every genealogical

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4 Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

account of Western secular modernity needs to take account of those colonial and inter-civilizational encounters. Any comprehensive narrative of the modern civilizing process must take into account the Western European encounter with other civilizations. The very category of "civilization" in the singular only emerges out of these inter-civilizational encounters.

Moreover, this is even more the case when one attempts a genealogical reconstruction of the unique modern secular category of "religion," which has now also become globalized. The modern secular invention of the "world religions" and the disciplinary institutionalization of the scientific study of religion are intimately connected with this globalization of religion. One should be careful, however, to avoid making an essentialized secular modernity the dynamic causal force of everything, including religion, as some genealogies of the secular are now prone to do. One must simply recognize that there are no bounded histories within nation-states, within civilizations, or within religions. Even much of the master reform process of medieval Christianity and the renaissance and recovery of the memory of classical civilization as a now integral part of the collective European past are not fully intelligible without taking into account the Christian-European encounter with Islam and the many civilizational borrowings it acquired through such an encounter.

Furthermore, Christian missions always accompanied European colonialism. Even in the case of French republican colonialism, *l'état laïque* and *l'église catolique,* which were constantly at loggerheads at home, worked hand in hand in *la mission civilatrice* in the French colonies, whether in Muslim Algiers, in preaxial Madagascar, or in Buddhist Vietnam. In any case, even without looking at any particular outcome of the colonial encounter between Western Christian and post-Christian secular modernity and other civilizations, one can confidently say that generally the outcome is unlikely to have been simply the emptying of the non-Western and the superimposition of modern Western secular patterns and social imaginaries. Nor was it possible to simply reject the colonial encounter and preserve one's own civilizational patterns and social imaginaries, unaffected by Western secular modernity. The modern secular immanent frame may become globalized, but this will always happen as an interactive, dynamic interlocking, transforming and refashioning preexisting non-Western civilizational patterns and social imaginaries with Western modern secular ones. Moreover, in the same way "our"

modern secular age is fundamentally and inevitably post-Christian. The emerging multiple modernities in the different postaxial civilizational areas are likely to be post-Hindu, or post-Confucian, or post-Muslim; that is, they will also be a modern refashioning and transformation of already existing civilizational patterns and social imaginaries.

We can finally, after this long detour, pose again the question, how is the process of globalization likely to affect "our" and Taylor's secular age? If, as I pointed out, globalization entails a certain decentering, provincializing, and historicizing of Europe and of European secular modernity, even in relation to the different pattern of American modernity within the same immanent frame, then it is unlikely that "our" secular age will simply become the common global secular age of all humanity, or that "our" secular age will become absolutely unaffected by this process of globalization and by the encounter with the emerging non-Western and in many respects nonsecular modernities. We are entering here the realm of social scientific forecasting, and we all know how dismal and inaccurate the record of the social sciences is in this respect. I certainly will not claim any special powers of futuristic vision. But certainly one can project into our global futures, all respect for historical contingency notwithstanding, some patterns already visible in the global present.

One likely effect, staying now within Taylor's analysis, is the further expansion of what he describes as the nova and supernova effects, so that all religions of the world, old and new, preaxial, axial, and postaxial, become available for individual appropriation anytime and anywhere, thus multiplying the options of conversion, cross-pressures, and individual search for transcendence. But as long as those paths remain individual and thus private and "invisible," in Thomas Luckmann's sense of the term,[5] they will serve to enrich our existing globalized spiritual and religious supermarket, but they are unlikely to shake up our immanent frame or fundamentally challenge exclusive humanism. It is worth pointing out, however, in this context the significantly different patterns of reception of "other" religions one finds in radically secular and religiously homogeneous Europe and in the highly religious and pluralistic United States. In Europe, the only visible collective dynamic is the

5 Thomas Luckmann, The Invisible Religion: Transformation of Symbols in Industrial Society (New York: MacMillan, 1967). Originally published as Das Problem der Religion in der modernen Gesellschaft (Freiburg, 1963).

massive conversion to secularity, either in the form of the movement from Christian affiliation to disaffiliation—that is, the unchurching of the European population—or from belief to unbelief—that is, the growth in the surveys of the categories of "no religion" and "atheist."

Taylor's description of the nova and supernova effects of the age of authenticity seems indeed hardly applicable to contemporary European societies, which, I would argue, basically remain extremely homogeneous, both in their forms of religiosity and in their forms of secularity, at least when compared with the already highly religious and extremely pluralistic and dynamic denominational system in the United States. The results from the recent Pew survey of American religiosity, based on a rather large representative sample, reveal: (1) the absolute, practically unchanged persistence of theistic belief (over 90 percent of the American population); (2) the increasingly dynamic fluency of religious denominational affiliation and the high level of conversions (practically one third of all Americans claim a different religious affiliation as adults from the one they had as children); and (3) a relatively significant weakening of religious denominational affiliation (those with "no religion" have doubled in the past decade, from 9 percent to 18 percent of the American population). But one should be careful in interpreting the change as evidence that the process of secularization is finally also taking place in the United States, since a majority of those without religion also fall within the category of "spiritual, not religious," and this can hardly be interpreted as evidence of conversion to outright secularity or to exclusive humanism.

Similar evidence emerges from the radically different patterns of incorporation of non-Western immigrant religions in post-Christian secular Europe and in Christian secular America. I would venture to say that there is no religion anywhere in the world that has not taken root at least individually, but also most likely communally, somewhere in the United States. Non-Western immigrant religions—Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism—are taking root and becoming American religions in the same way as Catholicism and Judaism eventually became, after much resistance, incorporated into Protestant Christian America, and into the denominational system as American religious denominations. Although such evidence may serve to put into question the extent to which the religious situation in the United States fits into Taylor's vision of a secular age, in itself this burgeoning religious pluralism is unlikely to fundamentally challenge the immanent frame.

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The more relevant question, to which at this point one can only offer a tentative speculative answer, is whether the already apparent emergence of multiple and successful non-Western modernities beyond the single case of Japan, signaled by the rise of China and India as global economic, political, and sociocultural powers, is likely to shake at least the stadial consciousness of Western secular modernity. We do not know whether the destabilization of the secular stadial consciousness is likely to be accompanied by the emergence of a global postsecular age, in which the particularism and exceptionalism of Western secular modernity become increasingly visible. Undoubtedly it will force Europeans to come to terms with— that is, to become for the first time reflexively aware of—their post-Christian secularity. As is already happening with the rather hostile reception of Islam in Europe, this is likely to be accompanied by the reflexive reaffirmation and reformulation of European Christian and secular identities. But to speak of a postsecular Europe may be a bit premature.

However, one could speculate, if within non-Western civilizations new modern forms (post-Hindu, post-Buddhist, post-Confucian, post-Muslim) of postaxial transcendence beyond simple human flourishing were to become widely and globally available, then we would be compelled to speak of a global postsecular age. But it is futile to try to prophesy the possible forms and contents of such postsecular social imaginaries. In any case, the new global age is likely to be characterized by the increasing loosening of territorial civilizational boundaries and by the spread of what could be called global denominationalism.

If such a future comes to pass, then Taylor is likely to be recognized as the last philosopher of secular modernity and as the visionary prophet of the dawn of a postsecular age, as somebody who helped to make our own secular age reflexively available for us and in doing so helped to shake and destabilize even further our secular social imaginary and to open wider cracks in our secular immanent frame. I doubt, however, that the new postsecular paths of transcendence that may become available to us ordinary humans would be able to satiate Taylor's personal thirst for transcendent eternity and divine incarnation.

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