

Openness and orthodoxy: Charles Taylor's therapeutic ambitions in *A Secular Age*
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1. Introduction

In his introduction to the recently published *Radical Orthodoxy Reader* (2009), Simon Oliver lauds Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (SA) as a work 'in many ways highly consistent with writings in the Radical Orthodoxy sphere'. John Milbank, in his review of SA, goes so far as to suggest that '[i]n many ways one could attach the label "radically orthodox" to Taylor with still more justification than to those, including myself, who have traded intellectually under this logo'. Still, aside from some clear parallels and complementarities identified by Taylor himself between his narrative of secularization and what he calls the 'Intellectual Deviation' story promoted by Milbank and others, the broadly liberal practical program Taylor defends in SA for overcoming 'disenchantment' seems incompatible with the political program of Radical Orthodoxy, especially Milbank's recent call for the development of a 'new mode of Christendom'. One may say that Taylor emerges from SA as a champion of 'openness', not orthodoxy; at least not in Milbank's sense.

This paper presents a close reading of SA intended to show how it may be read as a self-contained therapeutic project in Wittgenstein's sense designed, in two stages, (1) to liberate the reader from the prejudicial and constraining effects of the standard story of secularization and offer 'the immanent frame' as a new 'best account' of our lived experience, then (2) to offer a complete redescription of the immanent frame, in broadly Christian theological language, intended to help lead the reader into an 'open space' where the possibility of a relation to 'spiritual sources', so often stifled in our disenchanted political culture, may again appear as a 'live option'. In this sense I argue that Taylor comes close to defending a broadly pragmatist, Jamesian, and even at a certain point fideistic conception of religious belief which, at

least in its practical implications, is more reminiscent of John Dewey's 'common faith' or Richard Rorty's 'romantic polytheism' than of Milbank's orthodoxy.

2. Into the 'open space'

The first stage of Taylor's project unfolds in chapters one through fifteen of the book and is built around three main features: the presentation of his phenomenological methodology and distinctive definition of religion, his new story of Western secularization, and his description of the immanent frame. Each of these features, I argue, helps set the stage for Taylor's defense (in chapter fifteen, 'The Immanent Frame') of a radically 'open' and even, for a moment, fideistic account of religious belief.

2.1. Taylor's method: the transcendence / immanence distinction

Taylor's approach in SA is distinct from the sort employed in other recent treatments of secularization for its attention to 'lived experience', or the 'conditions' under which people adopt or reject religious belief. Taylor calls the object of this approach 'secularity 3', and contrasts it with more commonly studied changes in religious life such as the disappearance of religion from the public sphere ('secularity 1') and decline of private devotional practices ('secularity 2'). Investigations in these latter areas are characteristically empirical, but Taylor's aim is to achieve a broader or deeper view; to go around the backs of such studies to articulate 'background' features of our experience which in the present age guide and influence our adoption of any beliefs whatsoever, 'religious' or otherwise. In short, Taylor seems to want to develop a 'phenomenology' of secularization, but with a Kantian twist. At every step

he will both attend to and work to articulate features of lived human experience, yet also not shy from drawing conclusions concerning the conditions of its possibility.

Taylor begins from the notion of ‘fullness’, which he takes to describe something close to a human universal. In ‘moments of fullness’, everyday reality is ‘broken through’ and we find our ‘highest aspirations and energies ... lined up’, producing a kind of personal unity and charging us with energy. No aspect of this experience is necessarily special or esoteric. We may feel it when engaged in sport, practicing an art, or walking on a sunny day; we all experience this. Employing a topographical language which has served him elsewhere, Taylor suggests that we orient ourselves in relation to these experiences wherever we find them and identify a ‘place’ of fullness to which we strive to return. The difference between religious ‘believers’ and ‘unbelievers’ is apparent in their different intuitions about where to ‘locate’ this place on their ‘moral/spiritual’ topography. The religiously unmusical tend to describe it as immanent, situated wholly within nature and human life; ‘believers’ describe it as in some sense transcendent.

And so Taylor ‘reads’ religion in terms of transcendence and immanence, yet immediately he expresses reservation. Like the similar distinction between the natural and the supernatural such language is theoretical, employed in explicit articulations of our experience but somehow alien to it, and Taylor wants to get ‘beneath’ that theoretical level. To understand how he does this I propose to postpone examination of Taylor’s own definition of transcendence, offered in the book’s introduction, in order first to enumerate three ways in which Taylor redescribes the transcendence/immanence distinction elsewhere in the book, all more

compatible with his phenomenological (and therapeutic) ambitions. By keeping in mind these redescriptions, I would submit, one can better understand why Taylor gives us the definition of transcendence which he does.

The first redescription immediately follows Taylor's introduction of the distinction. Rather than talk about transcendence and immanence, he suggests, we might do better to cast the difference between believers and unbelievers in terms of their different conceptions of flourishing and renunciation in the moral life. 'Believers' are apt to regard human flourishing as a condition not wholly attainable within the parameters of ordinary life and may, in practice, be willing to renounce central goods like wealth, family, or even bodily health in the pursuit of some 'true flourishing' beyond the everyday. 'Unbelievers' tend to see this willingness as leading to a kind of self-mutilation, and prefer to limit their ambition to the achievement of as many human goods as possible – perhaps also for as many human beings as possible – within the limits of ordinary life alone.

Taylor's second redescription occurs some 400 pages later, where he draws a distinction between a 'transformation perspective' and an 'immanence perspective'. These are 'tempers or outlooks' in our civilization. Many, like St. Francis of Assisi, are 'deeply moved' to give up everything and pursue some good beyond life, regarding their sacrifices as in fact showing forth life's true and deeper meaning. Others, today more numerous, are inclined to disparage such asceticism as 'senseless self denial' or an enslavement to Hume's monkish virtues.

Further on Taylor offers a third and final redescription, closely related to this distinction of ‘perspectives’, in his discussion of a ‘two dimensional’ axis in which some social dilemmas may be addressed. The axis consists of a ‘horizontal space’ and a ‘vertical space’. One may always address a dilemma simply in the horizontal space, awarding a fair resolution based on the apparent state of affairs. In some cases however one can make ‘a vertical move’, lifting both parties to ‘a new point where the issue is not so totally zero-sum ... a *new horizontal space* where the resolution will be less painful/damaging for both’. The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa is offered as an example. Moving upward in ‘vertical space’ we accede to a horizontal space which is ‘new’ but empirically the same. The immanent world – the ordinary horizontal space – is ‘transformed’, and new options and possibilities become apparent within the everyday.

By developing the transcendence/immanence distinction in these three ways – as a distinction between an ordinary flourishing and a ‘true’ flourishing which calls for renunciation, between immanence and transformation ‘perspectives’, and between ordinary and ‘transformed’ horizontal spaces – Taylor charges what was a primarily theoretical distinction with the content of lived experience. Our attention is directed away from how we actually do describe the ‘location’ or nature of our experience of fullness in explicit or theoretical terms (i.e., whether we prefer to talk about ‘God’, the categorical imperative, or the greatest happiness of the greatest number) and directed instead toward the underlying factors which drive or motivate us in choosing the language we do. The content of our explicit descriptions does remain important for Taylor – unlike Rorty, he is convinced that our accounts do stand in a relation of greater or lesser adequacy to ‘The Way Things Are’ – but we can only ever hope

to judge the degree of this adequacy by attending phenomenologically to our pre-articulate experience of these underlying factors (which he will later call ‘cross pressures’) and not by any merely ‘horizontal’ logical or empirical examination in the manner of natural theology.

Religion, as entailing a relation to ‘transcendence’ in this very practical sense, presents itself as a kind of attitude, or perhaps a family of attitudes, that one may adopt in response to some vision of the good, and takes its place among a range other possible and perhaps also justifiable attitudes one could have adopted in its stead. The ‘transcendent’ comes to look less like the ‘supernatural’ – understood as, say, another plane of reality we can investigate and describe in much the same way as we do the natural world – and more like a transformed (*qualitatively* distinct) experience and perception of ordinary life.

Keeping in mind these redescriptions we may now fruitfully examine the definition of transcendence Taylor provides in his introduction, the structure of which clearly illustrates the kind of practical and motivational re-orientation I have been describing. Three ‘dimensions’ of transcendence are identified, the first being ‘the crucial one’. Namely, ‘the *sense that* there is some good higher than, beyond human flourishing’. The content in this first dimension is phenomenological and pre-articulate; it is a ‘sense’. The second dimension, which is ontologically substantive and closer to how many religious believers conceive of transcendence, is proposed as a condition of the possibility of the first:

‘But of course, this notion of a higher good as attainable by us *could only make sense in the context of* belief in a higher power, the transcendent God of faith which appears in most definitions of religion’.

Taylor's choice of words makes clear that for him it is our experience, and not any objective fact about God's existence or non-existence, that takes priority when we articulate an ontology. Put otherwise: our faith in the existence of the 'God of faith' – a God before whom, as Heidegger put it, we can dance and kneel and pray – may be reached by means of a transcendental argument (though most believers would not describe it in this formal sense) starting from our experiences of fullness or transformation. Taylor reaches his third dimension of transcendence by the same transcendental means:

'our potential transformation ... *requires that* we see our life as going beyond the bounds of its "natural" scope between birth and death; our lives extend beyond "this life"'.

Taylor's thinking about our relation to transcendence, and about how we talk about it, relies on two important lines of argument developed in his earlier work but never set out explicitly in SA. I have relied on these above; they should be made explicit before proceeding. These are his notions of (1) a 'best account' of reality, and (2) an 'interpretive dialectic'.

Taylor's 'best account principle' holds simply that we are justified in supposing that our most convincing ontological picture does in fact correspond to reality, such that we may act on its basis unhampered by a crippling skepticism. Yet foundationalism this is not. The principle is premised on the supposition that our accounts remain always provisional and always a matter of interpretation, in this sense coming close to Rorty's notion of a 'final vocabulary'. But Taylor's most immediate interlocutor here, as elsewhere in the book, is not Rorty but Hegel. Whereas Hegel saw fit to draw firm ontological conclusions on the basis of human

experience, Taylor regards such conclusions as necessarily partial, ever subject to revision and improvement – *merely* best accounts. In short, Taylor's approach is 'weak', Hegel's 'strong'. Taylor regards the kind of ontological certitude Hegel sought as available only in closed explanatory systems such as the natural sciences (where we seek understanding in the form of *Erklärung*, in Dilthey's sense). Our expectations in the human sciences, and particularly in relation to our experience of fullness, need to be different primarily because of the nature of their object, human persons, as 'self-interpreting' animals whose identities are constituted in dialogue and narrative. Our aim here is to understand (*verstehen*) in a manner more characteristic of the human sciences. Such phenomenological reflection can get us far – and indeed for Taylor there is somewhere to 'get' to, i.e. closer to a true account – but can never bring us to the end of inquiry.

In a related notion Taylor describes the interaction of these best accounts in human conversation as an 'interpretive dialectic'. Unlike a 'strict dialectic', which moves from indubitable first premises to inescapable conclusions, an interpretive dialectic never presumes such certainty. Taylor portrays this process as proceeding on the basis of practical reason and, as noted, is convinced unlike Rorty that the process does lead, if asymptotically, to an increasingly true account of reality.

2.2. Reform Master Narrative

The majority of SA is occupied with the articulation of a new narrative meant to supersede what Taylor regards as the inadequate standard story of secularization theory. The narrative's details are not crucial to our purpose here, though something must be said con-

cerning (1) why he sees this long narrative as necessary, and (2) his key notions of Reform and disenchantment.

In the tantalizingly brief three pages of the book's epilogue Taylor sets his own story of secularization, which he calls his 'Reform Master Narrative (RMN)', in relation to the story developed by Milbank and others, cited above, which he calls the 'Intellectual Deviation (ID)' account. Though he affirms the accuracy of the ID story, Taylor thinks we need his own RMN as a complement:

'we need RMN to upset the unilinear story [of ID], to show the *play* of destabilization and recomposition. The understanding of *social imaginaries* is crucial to explain these'.

In other words, Taylor's RMN takes seriously two things that ID does not. First, it is willing to admit just how *contingent* have been the changes in attitude toward religion over the last five centuries. These changes have followed no underlying 'logic', and cannot be regarded merely as a working out of the consequences of philosophical nominalism. In a real sense the whole process could have been otherwise; taken *as* a whole, indeed, it presents itself as a kind of 'play', a notion taken from Schiller (not Derrida) that Taylor develops in several places in the book. A second thing RMN takes seriously is the 'social imaginary' – not merely 'society' or material factors in an empirical sense, but rather the shared, tacit framework holding together the various 'conditions of belief' Taylor has named as his primary interest. This notion of a social imaginary will be important below in our discussion of the immanent frame. For

the moment it is sufficient to note that, by paying attention to these frameworks, RMN draws attention to an important dimension of the story of modern secularization that tends to remain undeveloped in ID accounts.

In addition to these motivations, and in line with what I am calling the book's therapeutic ambitions, Taylor's story-telling may be regarded as having a pedagogical purpose. If, as suggested by Taylor's work on personal identity, our sense of identity as inhabitants of a secular age is essentially narrational and grounded in a background story of 'how we got here' (both individually and collectively), and if this sense of identity is constrained and inarticulate in crucial ways (as the whole project of SA seems to presuppose), then we can hope to free ourselves from this inadequate sense of identity only by 'talking our way out of it'; by correcting and re-telling the inadequate 'background story' of secularization underlying it. Such a reading as this is able to account for the odd fact that Taylor's book declines to address at any length the work of other academic authors with whom he would seem to be in conversation, notably Karl Löwith, Hans Blumenberg, and Milbank himself. This declination makes sense, however, if one accepts that such academic engagement is not Taylor's main aim. He tells a story because he aims at recovery and transformation, prizes which no purely intellectual account can hope to win.

Two notions in Taylor's RMN are especially important and do need to be mentioned: disenchantment, and Reform. That our world today is 'disenchanted' in more or less Weber's sense is taken for granted by Taylor, yet his development of this notion is distinctive for its identification of 'Reform', and not the rise of the new natural sciences, as the engine driving

this process. Both Protestant and Catholic reformers, he suggests, sought to collapse what they regarded as two ‘tracks’ of believers – monks with a ‘higher’ vocation, and lay-people reliant on superstition – to form one track, making everyone equal before the Judgment. This move led to ‘disenchanted’ transformations in numerous areas, all of which functioned somehow to collapse the transcendent or supernatural into the immanent or natural: (1) the cosmos with its ‘great chain of being’ became the non-teleological ‘universe’, analogous to a large machine; (2) the two orders of time – ‘higher’ / kairotic, and profane / secular – were collapsed into a notion of time that is secular and ‘flat’; (3) a notion of the self as ‘porous’ and susceptible to spiritual and physical ‘influences’ gave way to a ‘buffered self’, a formal subject in a field of inert objects; and (4) a sense of being ‘embedded’ and constantly ‘engaged’ in the world gave way to a new ideal of ‘disengagement’ inspired by the natural sciences.

Taylor describes how these transformations gave rise to an ‘exclusive humanism’ able to articulate new moral sources to replace the Christian ideal of agape. In the nineteenth century this humanism sparked a ‘nova’ of ‘religious/spiritual options’ such as Romanticism, neo-Nietzscheanism, and various religious fundamentalisms; in the twentieth, it has produced a ‘supernova’ of radically de-institutionalized spiritual itineraries, a ‘galloping pluralism’. Taylor’s description of this radically pluralistic context, together with his description of the various disenchanting transformations listed above, give us finally a complete picture of the ‘conditions of belief’ today.

2.3. The Immanent Frame

In chapter fifteen Taylor brings together these conditions of belief to form a new analytic representation of our contemporary situation, the Immanent Frame. In what follows I locate this new image by setting it in relation to two others Taylor develops elsewhere (the ‘tacit background’ in epistemology, and the social imaginary), describe its major features, and show how Taylor’s description of it leads him to defend what is, for a moment, a radically open, fideistic account of the *reasons* why we adopt beliefs, ‘religious’ or otherwise.

Background structures, social imaginaries, and the immanent frame

To locate the concept of the immanent frame in Taylor’s thinking one needs to employ the phenomenological language of ‘background’ and ‘foreground’. In fact three levels should be distinguished: (1) our ‘raw’ unmediated *experience*, (2) the *background* understanding through which we initially apprehend that experience, and (3) the *foreground* language in which we articulate positive accounts of it. About our so-called ‘raw’ experience nothing can be said directly; this is the level of physiological events of the sort studied and conceptualized by neuroscientists. Yet even our most basic apprehension of these experiences bring us into the realm of interpretation and articulation within which two levels may be distinguished. The first is that of our background understandings, consisting of pre-articulate, pre-conceptual structures which function analogously, in different ways, to Kant’s schematization, Heidegger’s *Lichtung*, or Wittgenstein’s *lebensform*. These structures define the field of possibilities for our foreground activities, both in discourse and action, and remain tacit unless brought

under analysis. Our everyday activities are conducted wholly on the level of the foreground, this being the point at which language is brought to bear on experience.

Articulating the nature of these background structures has been a longtime strategy of Taylor's. In his earlier work on the moral life and modern epistemology he fruitfully follows several other thinkers (e.g., Michael Polanyi, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty) in identifying, on the level one might say of the 'individual', a epistemological background or 'tacit dimension' (Polanyi) prior to any explicit theory of knowledge. Taylor's conversations with Hubert Dreyfus on this notion of a tacit dimension and especially on the human practice of 'coping' seems to have been important for his thinking, and for some years he has been working with Dreyfus to prepare a book on the subject, tentatively entitled *Retrieving Realism*. More recently Taylor has developed Cornelius Castoriadis's notion of a social imaginary, both in *SA* and in his earlier *Modern Social Imaginaries* (MSI), as an analogous kind of framework on a communal level. Taylor makes clear emphatically that a social imaginary is not an 'intellectual scheme'. As he writes in MSI,

'I am thinking ... of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations'

The notion plays an important role in Taylor's 'Reform Master Narrative' as the site of the emergence of what he calls new 'meta-topical spaces' in Western societies. Four of these play an important role: the public sphere, the sovereign people, the economy, and later the 'space

of fashion'. We 'inhabit' these spaces in our relations with others, and this common habitation makes certain features of our social life possible.

Taylor's notion of the immanent frame resembles our ('individual') tacit epistemological background in its concern with the conditions of belief, both 'religious' and otherwise. It also resembles a social imaginary insofar as it is 'communal', stretching across and binding together – even constituting – whole societies and cultural formations. In this way it may perhaps be described as a kind of 'moral-epistemological imaginary': epistemological, for its concern with belief; moral, for its conviction that epistemology is inescapably 'driven' by a relation to moral sources and motivations.

Character of the immanent frame

Taylor develops his notion of the immanent frame as a topographical metaphor. At first sight this terrain seems two-dimensional, a kind of horizontal spectrum bracketed by two 'poles'. At one end gather those who loudly affirm the transcendent, at the other its likewise outspoken deniers. These poles define the frame. The vast majority of people occupy some 'middle position', moving toward one end or the other as they feel prompted to do so by the true believers on either side.

Taylor emphasizes that the frame itself, despite its 'immanence' or non-inclusion of transcendence, does not determine whether we *could* experience some relation to transcendent sources, even while remaining within the frame. As in our relation to disenchanted nature it is left for us alone to 'read' the frame as 'open' (to the possibility that we could experi-

ence such a relation) or ‘closed’. This freedom brings with it a new danger Taylor calls ‘spin’. Partisans at either pole offer accounts of the frame that seem to *compel* either openness or closure by making one of the two seem obvious, the other simply mad or bad. Although ‘closed spin’ is hegemonic in today’s academy, ‘open spin’ is no less pernicious. Both forms are an invariably negative feature of the frame as both constrain our freedom.

More often than not spin is organized into large, violently compelling nodes Taylor calls world structures, which he likens here and elsewhere to Wittgenstein’s notion of pictures that ‘hold us captive’. Taylor describes four such structures that drive toward closure (called ‘closed world structures’, or CWS), yet passes too quickly over a parallel notion of what I will call ‘open world structures’ – nodes of ‘open’ spin, propagated by those convinced that ‘the existence of God can be “proven”’. One imagines these would include many accounts offered by fundamentalist groups or strong advocates of natural theology. Neither sort of these structures is ‘open’ in Taylor’s primary sense. Both are, as Merleau-Ponty has written, ‘as closed as madness’.

That we should come under the thrall of these structures is the great danger of the immanent frame, especially since we no longer recognize any Archimedean point from which to judge their merits objectively. The frame itself is mute and passes no judgment. Yet we can hope to negotiate these ideological influences by adopting a ‘reflective construal’ of our beliefs (i.e., our currently favored ontology), and inquiring into the nature of our own lived experience as this presents itself in the ‘tacit dimension’ of our consciousness or as a manifestation of certain features of our social imaginary. To do so is difficult and not common even

today, and was not possible for the vast majority in an enchanted world. The neutrality of the immanent frame has made this sort of reflection possible on a much broader scale – it has egalitarianized it – yet like our ancestors we remain far more often inclined to hold beliefs ‘naïvely’, comfortable until wrested from our pre-critical slumbers by some event or new realization.

The open space: from ‘leap of faith’ to ‘anticipatory confidence’

By adopting a truly reflective construal of our beliefs, we are enabled to stand in the ‘open space’ (an image Taylor adopts from James) beyond the frame’s ordinary two-dimensional limits. From within this space, stories ‘spun’ by the frame’s self-assured partisans no longer seem so convincing and world structures of every sort lose their aura of authority. With these partisan ‘loudspeakers’ thus silenced we are able finally to reflect without fear or prejudice on the nature of our lived experience, and to ask which reading of the frame – open or closed – can best account for what we see.

Taylor thinks that we will feel a pre-articulate ‘attraction’ to one reading or the other, or perhaps to some mixture of the two. We will simply be struck by an ‘over-all sense’ that a certain reading gets things right, even if we remain unconvinced by certain of its details or find ourselves unable to provide a compelling rational or evidential justification for our attraction. We will be able to give *some* reasons for it, certainly, but Taylor suggests that our ‘over-all sense’ of the rightness of a given reading will always ‘anticipate or leap ahead of the reasons we can muster for it. It is something in the nature of a hunch’.

The moment in which we form this hunch Taylor describes as a ‘leap of faith’ in James’s sense. *Whatever* the content of our hunch – be it open or closed, theistic or atheistic or agnostic – our formation of it and adoption on its basis of a certain reading of the frame will always reach beyond (i.e., will never be wholly justifiable in terms of) available reasons and evidence. Importantly, we cannot avoid forming a hunch; we cannot go without an ‘overall sense of things’. The only question is whether we will form this sense for ourselves in the open space, free from fear and prejudice, or rather seek refuge in the false certainties of a world structure, which, whether the structure is ‘closed’ or (in the partisan sense) ‘open’, presents itself as a refusal of freedom. We are ‘called’, as it were, to stand in the open space and to make an authentic response in the basis of our own experience. We are called to autonomy.

I have suggested at several points that this first stage of Taylor's therapeutic project leads him to defend a kind of Jamesian fideism concerning the reasons why we adopt beliefs. I have also suggested that his argument leads to this conclusion only ‘at a certain point’ or ‘for a moment’. In this section I explain what I mean by this ‘fideistic moment’ in Taylor’s book, and show how he overcomes it by redescribing James’s ‘leap of faith’ as an extension of ‘anticipatory confidence’.

Certainly Taylor’s central ambition in the first stage of his project is to reeducate his readers into an awareness of freedom. I have suggested already that his RMN may be read as having this sort of pedagogical purpose. It is significant in this regard that twice during his speech upon accepting the Templeton Prize in 2007 Taylor evokes the image of being

‘trapped’: we are not ‘totally *trapped*’, he says, within the prevailing ‘very narrow understanding that secular time is all there is’, and we ‘fool ourselves’ if we think that the ‘spiritual sources ... [so] marginalized in this age’ are utterly un-retrievable. ‘That’s not the way human life works, we’re not *trapped* in that way’.

Taylor’s main concern, as expressed in these extracts and also in SA, is clearly the threat posed by ‘closed’ world structures – e.g., by the constraining assumptions of modern epistemology, or by a sense that science has ‘disproved religion’. As noted above however these structures are not the only kind. ‘Open’ world structures too can trap us by presenting a particular vision of God as ‘obvious’. Taylor suggests three ways in which they might do so: by appeal to *reason*, or a sense that ‘the existence of God can be “proven”’; by appeal to *authority* (‘whether the Bible or the Pope’); or by appeal of *empirical evidence*, for example by reference to miracles understood in the ‘standard modern’ way as ‘punctual intervention[s] interrupting a regular order’. None of these, whether in the service of ‘closed’ *or* ‘open’ structures, can exempt us from our ultimately free choice of how to read the immanent frame. Such is the hard truth of ‘mutual fragilization’.

It is this point in Taylor’s argument which I’d like to call the book’s ‘fideistic moment’. So radical is Taylor’s desire to free us from ‘spin’ of all kinds that, in the realm of our *reasons* for adopting beliefs, he cuts every rope and harness to leave us, as it were, alone on James’s mountain precipice. As he writes:

‘[o]f course, experience can bring an increase in our confidence in our stance. But we never move to a point beyond anticipation, beyond all hunches, to the kind of certain-

ty that we can enjoy in certain narrower questions, say, in natural science or in ordinary life’.

In this sense one may say with confidence that Taylor’s famous ‘theistic hunch’, expressed near the end of his *Sources of the Self* (i.e., his sense that the Christian God of faith is the most adequate moral source) will and must remain just that – a hunch. Yet this realization need not be crippling; no more so, at least, than the conviction that our ‘best accounts’ are always provisional and subject to revision. The move is perhaps best regarded as a denial of knowledge in order to make room for faith, the pedigree of which, at least, can hardly be gainsaid.

As too for James, Taylor’s affirmation of our radical freedom leads him to counsel a ‘leap of faith’, already discussed above. – I leave aside for a moment his notion of anticipatory confidence. Two questions arise concerning this ‘leap’. First, what are we *doing* when we leap? In language suggested earlier in the book, it seems that to leap is to locate our place of fullness – not yet to articulate in language an account of its nature, but simply to inhabit it or choose to act from within it. This initial habitation is an act of faith, insofar as it always reaches beyond reasons and evidence, though not of *blind* faith, since we need not assume that these are wholly absent. But reasons and evidence cannot ‘leap’ for us. In Scholastic language, we must first believe so that, in time, we may understand.

A second question is related to this: what are we leaping *towards*? Not, clearly, towards any positive or propositional ‘content’. Some kind of description will of course accompany our leap (we give ourselves over, say, to Jesus, or Enlightenment, or the purity of

Islam) but for Taylor these sorts of articulations will never be the *motivating* factor in a leap that is truly free. One might rather say that we leap toward a ‘hypergood’, to employ a term developed by Taylor in earlier work – i.e., a good around which all other human goods will be for us defined and ordered. The wholly pre-articulate nature of our attraction to a hypergood is significant, and at least one author has suggested that an ambiguity arises here concerning whether this attraction is primarily ethical, as Taylor claims, or rather aesthetic. It is necessary for our purpose here only to note that the *content* of that toward which we leap has been bracketed. Based on our sense of fullness, or pre-articulate attraction to a hypergood, we leap towards x or y , our leap itself being as such independent of the rational or empirical defensibility of its target.

Two moves Taylor makes at this point are crucial in his overcoming of this fideistic moment, and it will take him the rest of the book to fully develop their implications: they are, namely, (1) his distinction between the *reasons* for adopting a belief and the *content* of belief, and (2) his redescription of the leap of faith as an extension of ‘anticipatory confidence’.

Taylor distinguishes two meanings of ‘faith’. The first, employed in the notion of a ‘leap of faith’, refers to our motives for adopting a certain reading of the frame, and my use of the term to this point reflects this first meaning: when we leap toward some stance, open or closed, our leap always takes us beyond available reasons or evidence. But Taylor also identifies a second meaning, namely that, in ‘speak[ing] of theistic religion ... [‘faith’] refers to a crucial feature of our over-all sense of things, namely the personal relation of trust and confi-

dence in God. ... It describes the *content* of our position, not the *reasons* for it'. The emphasis is his.

Taylor's whole argument in the first stage of his project, I would like to suggest, turns on his first meaning of faith as concerning the *reasons* for belief. The conversation about religion and modernity is, he thinks, hung up in such 'foreground' debates carried out in the very ordinary horizontal space of the immanent frame, and his aim is to break us radically free from their hold – even to the point of defending fideism.

Yet the argument of his second stage seems clearly concerned with the second meaning of the term, with the 'content' of our position or, more specifically, with 'crucial feature[s] of our over-all sense of things'. For though we are lead up to James's precipice, and though we are left there without resource in the sense of adequate reasons or evidence, Taylor will not leave us wholly unequipped. By offering, in his second stage, a theological redescription of the frame and an account of various 'cross pressures' as these might be experienced from within the frame thus construed, Taylor gives us an example of what a truly 'open reading' of the frame might look like. This *exemplary* nature of the redescription is important: the theistic moves of his second stage seem to be offered as 'merely' Taylor's own best account of our situation which, like all best accounts, remains provisional and cannot claim finality.

This move from an emphasis on faith-as-*reasons* to faith-as-*content* is paralleled by Taylor's move from talking about a 'leap of faith' to talking about 'anticipatory confidence'. Although this shift is introduced in chapter fifteen, Taylor is not yet really justified in doing

so. He has not yet developed an account of *what* we are anticipating and *in what* we may have confidence. Such is precisely the task of his second stage.

3. Making ‘openness’ a live option

Throughout chapters sixteen through twenty of the book, in bits and pieces, Taylor develops a whole-scale redescription of the immanent frame with the aid of Christian theological language, and in doing so makes explicit the content implied – for him, as a Christian – by his notion of ‘anticipatory confidence’. In what follows, I begin by outlining the major components of this redescription, then examine the several ‘cross pressures’ Taylor identifies as aspects of our lived experience which, when considered without prejudice, might help us to perceive the frame in this new way – or in other words, which might help a leap toward an ‘open reading’ of the frame look like a ‘live option’ in James’s sense. Finally I consider what practical steps Taylor prescribes, for those willing to adopt an open reading, to overcome disenchantment and, in doing so, address the social and political malaises of our society.

3.1. The immanent frame as ‘field of resistance’

The central notion in Taylor’s theological redescription is ‘God’s Pedagogy’, which he introduces as part of a ‘hypothesis from within a Christian perspective’ (i.e., his own) concerning the roots of sacrificial violence. On this view, human beings are ‘born out of the animal kingdom’ with certain ‘numinous drives’, notably propensities toward violence, wild sexual expression, and a fascination with death and killing. This is ‘the fallen condition’. From his reflections on this condition Taylor draws two conclusions:

That '[1] God is slowly educating mankind, slowly turning it, transforming it from within. ... But at the same time, [2] the *pedagogy* is being stolen, has been misappropriated, and misapplied'

This divine pedagogy unfolds slowly within human history, below the radar of empirical observation, and today operates under the conditions of the immanent frame. Regarded in this light the frame appears as a 'field of resistance' or of 'opposition' to this pedagogical action. We may try to cooperate faithfully with the pedagogy, but we are far more often (in our 'fallen condition') inclined to 'steal' or 'misappropriate' it, and to harness God's transformative power in the service of 'something less than God'. The former response is good, the latter evil.

The greatest danger of our fallen condition on Taylor's account is just what one would expect it to be, namely, the temptation to *decide for ourselves what is good and what evil*, then to organize our societies in such a way as to eliminate evil (as we conceive it) once and for all. Taylor describes at length what he sees as a tendency in liberal modernity to 'pathologize' manifestations of our numinous drives; to dismiss them as merely perverse or criminal behavior best 'corrected' by therapy, medication, or institutionalization – i.e., best eliminated or hidden. Such an approach, Taylor thinks, presumes to 'know' the curriculum of God's pedagogy, and to know it so well as to justify violence and even programs of extermination against those who seem to be working against it. Of course Taylor opposes this, five times in the book citing the biblical notion that 'the wheat and tares remain together until the harvest'.

It is not for us to judge human practices in this ultimate sense, or to separate the ‘wheat’ from the ‘tares’. We do wrong to think we know good and evil.

But does this not leave us behind a veil of ignorance? How can we even perceive the movement of this pedagogy let alone cooperate with it? On Taylor's account our cooperation is a wholly contingent and almost accidental affair, bearing nothing in common with following a rule or code of conduct. However uncooperative or bungling our behavior, God responds skillfully to our situation like a good teacher, making of our recalcitrance a chance for learning and transformation. As Taylor puts it,

‘[on a biblical view,] God’s Providence [or Pedagogy] is his ability to respond to whatever the universe and human agency throw up. God is like a skilled tennis player, he can always return the serve’.

Here and in other work Taylor invokes the parable of the Good Samaritan to clarify what he means by responding to divine pedagogy. An important and revealing instance of this is offered in his Forward to a recently published collection of interviews by Ivan Illich:

‘[Jesus’ answer to the question ‘who is my neighbor?'] takes us beyond any established relation [among neighbors] into *the domain of accident or contingency*: my neighbor is someone I come across, bleeding in the road. It was *sheer accident* that I came along at just that time; but this accident can be the occasion for rebuilding *a skein of human relations animated by agape*. The Samaritan’s action is part of God’s response to the skewed serve the robbers have lobbed into history’.

Because we cannot ‘know’ the curriculum of God’s pedagogy we cannot knowingly ‘cooperate’ with it, but we can ‘respond’. This response will be authentic only if it is motivated purely by agape, and to this extent will contribute to the establishment of ‘a skein of human relation animated by agape’. This ‘skein of relations’ is certainly not to be confused with any institutional church; it corresponds to the mystical body of Christ, not the Church militant. To act on the basis of any motivation other than agape – say, under the guidance of reason (a moral code of conduct), authority (church hierarchy), or the efficient demands of the given empirical situation – can lead only to an ‘institutionalization’ of agape, and hence its perversion. Such a project could belong only to the immanent frame’s ‘partisans’ of openness, not to those standing truly in the open space. Taylor’s thinking here seems close to Illich’s, and indeed his discussion of Illich in chapter twenty of SA is highly sympathetic.

3.2. Desdemona and the cross-pressures

Standing on James’s precipice, bereft of adequate reasons or evidence, we are nonetheless never without our own pre-articulate ‘over-all sense of things’. In choosing whether to adopt an open reading of the frame our situation is not like that of a man waiting for the weather report to decide whether to take his umbrella. In choosing our reading, Taylor thinks, we have ‘alternative’, direct access in the form of our actual lived experience. He presents this point by reference to Desdemona in Shakespeare’s *Othello*. What makes that play a tragedy, he suggests, is that

‘[w]e hold its protagonist culpable in his too-ready belief of the evidence fabricated by Iago. He had an *alternative mode of access* to her innocence in Desdemona herself, if he could only have opened his heart/mind to her love and devotion. The fatal flaw in the tragic hero Othello is his inability to do this’.

Like Othello, we tend to privilege the ‘experience-far’ considerations of natural science (our Iago?) rather than the ‘experience-near’ data of our own lived experience. As a theist, Taylor makes this point in theological language: the voice of Desdemona is the voice of God, which reaches us as it did Isaiah more often as a gentle breeze than as a great wind; this gentle voice ‘must be very faint within the modern horizon’, suffering as it does from ‘systemic mistrust’.

It seems however that one could ‘read’ Desdemona’s voice in a various ways – as the voice of God, but also as the attraction of beauty, or the sublimity of nature or expressivist art. For Desdemona speaks to us only in the language of our own lived experience – the cross pressures – and Taylor’s description of these seems intended to promote simply an open reading of the frame, not necessarily a theistic one. Once we stand in the open space and recognize the voice of Desdemona for ourselves, we can make up our own minds about how to describe our relation to ‘transcendence’. Taylor’s only aim is to enable us to make that choice freely, precisely *not* to rob us of it by an exclusive promotion of theism.

In pursuit of this aim, Taylor directs our attention to three cross pressures characterizing human experience. One of these I have mentioned already: the ‘dilemmas’ related to our noumenal human attraction to violence, sex, and death. There are two others: (1) three ‘perennial human achievements’, and (2) our confrontation with an ethical ‘maximal demand’.

Echoing his claim in the introduction, in chapter sixteen Taylor argues that all philosophical positions, even materialism, ‘accept some definition of greatness and fullness in human life’. The difficulty for any account is to decide how to ‘square its ontology with [this] picture of fullness’. Three ‘forms of human achievement’ present themselves as especially hard to account for in this way, and notably parallel the subjects of Kant’s three *Critiques*: (1) thinking and conceptual spontaneity, (2) motivation and the validity of ethics, and (3) our ability to respond to beauty. Standing in the open space we can more clearly perceive our experiences in these areas and can consider, free from the effects of spin, the merits of various corresponding ‘ontologies’. Taylor suspects that such assessment will show that we need ‘some reference to the transcendent, or to a larger cosmic force’ (he does not say ‘God’) to ‘square’ our ontology with these experiences.

Alongside these rival understandings of fullness are other cross pressures related to our ‘ethical predicament’. Though introduced in chapter sixteen, the more concise statement of this ‘dilemma’ comes forty pages later in Taylor’s notion of the ‘maximal demand’, namely: how can we both define the truly highest moral or spiritual aspirations for human beings, then also show a path to reach these which doesn’t crush, mutilate, or deny what is essential to our humanity? How can we balance flourishing and renunciation?

Taylor charges that exclusive humanists are wrong to think they have navigated this. Such purely immanent solutions either underrate human depravity (they bowdlerize) or are cavalier about the costs of reaching the goal (they mortify or ‘mutilate’). Yet significantly he also acknowledges that Christians ‘don’t really “have the solution”’ either, for two reasons:

(1) the direction of healing or transformation they point to needs to be taken on faith, and (2) they can't 'exhibit fully what [their solution would] mean, lay it out in a code or a fully-specified life form, but only point to the exemplary lives of certain trail-blazing people and communities'. In either case, Taylor thinks that reflection on this predicament can lead us into the open space.

3.3. 'Re-enchantment'

Several times in public talks Taylor has been asked how we can 're-enchant' the world. Although such a question could seem suggested by Taylor's language (i.e., first an enchanted world, then disenchantment), Taylor himself for good reason never speaks of a 're-enchantment'. Unpacking the notion however can help clarify Taylor's conception of an appropriate positive response to divine pedagogy.

Dialectically, there can be no straightforward move back to an original affirmation (here, 'enchantment'), and so no 're-enchantment' understood as a simple return to a pre-modern condition. The conditions of the immanent frame have superseded all previous conditions. Our religious situation today is, Taylor thinks, just the sort described by James in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*: a climate of 'personal religion' in which each is guided in his or her 'quest' for the transcendent by a desire for authentic self-expression. As Taylor comments in his book on James, those who bemoan this state of affairs should ask whether the dangers of our current dispensation – superficiality, or lack of institutional commitment –

are really so much worse than previous dangers, such as hypocrisy, coercion by religious authorities, or the empty and sterile practice of ritual.

Yet Taylor wants to extend James's account to attend more explicitly to the *sacramental* and the *communal* dimensions of religious life. In this sense we may see Taylor as calling for a *kind* of local, piecemeal 're-enchantment' in three senses which loosely overlay these emendations of James – in space and in time (sacramentality), and in our shared narratives (communality).

First, a re-enchantment of 'space'. Taylor is concerned that modern notions of embodiment constrain our experience and deafen us to divine pedagogy. In many places, Taylor complains about what he calls 'excarnation', or the fact that in general 'embodied feeling is no longer a medium in which we relate to what we recognize as rightly bearing an aura of the higher'. Due both to the narrowness and over-intellectualism of modern epistemology and to iconoclastic movements of Reform, we are more inclined today to regard our bodies as simply the 'hardware' necessary to mediate our experience of the world. Many religious practices common in medieval Christendom expressed believers' connection with the transcendent by means of vivid sensual experiences such as the ritual of the Mass, festivals of the liturgical year, and 'creeping to the Cross'. Today, despite much talk in the academy about embodiment, a disengaged or managerial attitude to the body prevails. Our task, as Taylor sees it, is

'[to] rediscover the way in which life in our natural surroundings, as well as bodily feeling, bodily action, and bodily expression, can be channels of contact with fullness'

Taylor's influence by Merleau-Ponty is clear here, and one imagines that working against ex-carnation would involve in large part taking seriously Merleau-Ponty's critique of the Cartesian-Lockean epistemological picture.

Second, a re-enchantment of 'time'. Taylor believes we need to overcome the domination of the 'homogeneous, empty time' described by Walter Benjamin and again take seriously the need of human beings to structure time in 'kairotic knots', moments around which other times gather and from which they take their meaning. In Christendom this function was served by the liturgical year, and something like these 'knots' has remained essential to the way we craft narratives about our own lives and the history of our communities (notably in nationalist historiographies – e.g., 1776, 1789). One of the most interesting and well-crafted portions in *SA* is Taylor's discussion of time in chapter one, and he returns to the theme several times in the book.

Ultimately, he suggests that overcoming the hegemonic secular conception of time will entail the construction of 'mini-kairoi' in two senses: (1) in the preservation of 'cycles', by protecting the 'routines, [and] recurring forms in our lives' such as the week, seasons of the year, holidays and vacations; and (2) through the commemoration of 'once-for-all' moments in our shared public narratives, such as moments of 'founding, revolution, and liberation'. Though these 'mini-kairoi' will not bear the same cosmic significance or universally instituted public role as the kairotic structures of an enchanted world, and one imagines that their pursuit would be local, not global (hence, 'mini'), our conscious and shared prioritiza-

tion of their observance would help reestablish a common ‘ordering’ of our experience of time.

Third and finally, a re-enchantment of our shared narratives. Taylor emphasizes the importance of ‘personal itineraries’ or narrative accounts of individual human lives, a notion he introduces in connection with his own Catholic tradition but which seems to extend more broadly to describe the ‘questing’ after transcendence of anyone in the open space. The itineraries of Ivan Illich, Charles Péguy, and Gerard Manley Hopkins (all Catholic) are offered as examples. Taylor emphasizes, in a way which again seems to bring him close to Rorty, that no itinerary may be judged by a criterion outside human life. As he writes,

We should not ‘let the issue of final truth occlude the difference of itineraries. ... [T]he Church, as a communion of different peoples and ages, in mutual understanding and enrichment, is damaged, limited, and divided by an unfounded total belief in one’s own truth, which really better deserves the name of heresy’.

By the ‘Church’, Taylor surely means the kind of agapeic community referred to above. Historical, institutional forms he seems to regard as derivative from this, and the role of these forms is indeed left largely undeveloped. An agapeic community is an interpretive community and a ‘skein of human relations’, oriented toward the pursuit of ‘mutual understanding and enrichment’ within a shared moral horizon. It is constantly threatened by the ‘dangerous and damaging illusion’ that this hermeneutic character can ‘be finally set aside by some secure instance of authority (as cited above, ‘whether the Bible or the Pope’). That we should work

to form communities of this kind, and perhaps ultimately one single agapeic community or skein of relations (the Kingdom of God), seems to be Taylor's third sense of 're-enchantment'. Our efforts in this pursuit, as noted in his discussion above of the parable of the Good Samaritan, will always be contingent, even accidental, and emphatically not codifiable; they will be necessarily local, not global.

4. Conclusion

In his essay 'The Will to Believe', James argues that under certain conditions belief is reasonable in the absence of proof. These conditions are met when we are confronted by a 'genuine option' between two or more hypotheses that is 'live' or 'forced' as opposed to 'dead' or merely intellectual. In his book on James, Taylor identifies three factors which for James serve to make the option for faith a 'live' one, all of which may be seen to correspond with key elements in his own picture of our contemporary situation: *melancholy*, with the sense of moral/spiritual malaise in the immanent frame; *a confrontation with evil*, with the extreme 'noumenal' violence of our times; and *a sense of personal sin*, more loosely, with the widespread fear of acting or believing 'inauthentically'.

If Taylor's therapeutic project is successful, then the option for faith will seem more like a live option at the end of his book than it did at the beginning. Yet, if something like these correspondences are correct as I have drawn them here, then the 'faith' toward which Taylor seeks to lead us may, as I have been suggesting, be not primarily a theistic faith in the God of Abraham. It may be simply a 'common faith' in something like Dewey's sense, a plu-

realistic and broadly liberal openness to the possibility of relating to ‘spiritual sources’ and to the admission of references to them in our public conversations. Such may be our best chance at the realization of something like the new ‘skein of human relations’ Taylor hopes for, motivated if not by Christian agape then at least by a kind of agapeic solidarity.

As I have sought to demonstrate, Taylor's satisfaction with this simple ‘openness’ is not a capitulation to liberal modernity. Rather, it is founded upon two notions stemming from his own theistic faith.

The first of these has been discussed: his confidence in the working of divine pedagogy, or Providence. An illustration may help to clarify how Taylor seems to understand the practical function of this divine activity. If one imagines oneself in a hot air balloon and regards Taylor's ‘leap of faith’ as the launch of this balloon (i.e., a launch into the open space), then one may liken divine pedagogy to the wind currents into which the balloon is swept up. It is enough to get oneself off the ground; from there, the wind – the pedagogy – takes over, and we need only ‘respond’ to features of our own experience. To respond well one needs an adequate linguistic articulation of the experience of flight, and many such articulations are possible: not only the language of theism, but also of expressivist art, of natural sublimity, or of the deep ethical commitment of someone like Camus’s Dr. Rieux. As a theist, Taylor is convinced that the most effective navigators will pick up the language of theism, but as noted this is just a ‘hunch’, his own extension of anticipatory confidence. However one ultimately chooses to describe his or her experience of flight, Taylor seems to regard it as a sufficient first step that more of us should get ‘off the ground’ in this way, and enter into the hermeneu-

tic process of ‘responding’ to the currents. As a theist, he seems confident that God will take care of the rest.

Second, Taylor is satisfied with ‘openness’ because of his faith in the eschaton, or ‘harvest’ which shall reveal everything in its true meaning. If divine pedagogy is needed to guide our action, then this eschatological horizon is needed to charge it with ultimate meaning and sense. Providence grounds Taylor's confidence in the sufficiency of openness, but this eschatological confidence seems in a more substantive way to ground his own theistic hunch. For Taylor, the eschaton *is* the Archimedean point; it is that in accordance with which all our ontological accounts shall be judged and of which we, now, can never have complete knowledge. For the moment we see as in a glass darkly; in the eschaton, we shall see as in the light of day.

These convictions – in divine pedagogy and the eschaton – are ultimately what give content to Taylor’s notion of anticipatory confidence: we *anticipate* the eschaton, and have *confidence* that the working of divine pedagogy will get us there. They are also what allows Taylor's ‘best accounts’ to pack more ontological punch than Rorty’s ‘final vocabularies’. Together, they make clear why Taylor is willing to defend such an ‘open’ portrayal of contemporary religion and declines to offer any direct defenses or ‘proofs’ of theism as such. If we place our confidence in a code or a system (of theology, morality, theoretical rationality, etc.), we bar ourselves from a totally ‘open’, humble faith in God; only by aiming at openness can we hope to build a true and ever-developing orthodoxy which no code or system can capture.

This reading is fortified by considering Taylor's predictions concerning the future of religion, which come close to his earlier description (in chapter fourteen) of Mikhail Epstein's notion of 'minimal religion':

'the dominant secularization narrative ... will become less plausible over time. ... [T]he atmosphere of immanence will intensify a sense of living in a "waste land" for subsequent generations, and many young people will begin again to explore beyond the boundaries [of the immanent frame]'

In this way, Taylor anticipates that dogmatic anti-theism will 'be its own grave-digger' in Marx's sense. Theists need only let God win the battle for them. Christian evangelism should look a lot like Taylor's project in SA: a business of facilitating 'openness', advocating local modes of 're-enchantment', and gesturing at exemplary personal and communal 'itineraries' as non-formal exemplary standards by which our moral lives should be judged – all undertaken in the confidence that divine pedagogy, not our own self-assured apologetic efforts, will lead others to faith. On the last page of his book Taylor cites Robert Bellah's conviction that in the religious development of humanity, 'nothing is ever lost'. Taylor is surely convinced of the same.

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