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MODERNITY AND RELIGION:
BEYOND THE PHILOSOPHICAL NARRATIVES
OF SECULARISATION AND BACK

INTRODUCTION

Philosophical narratives are among the important factors shaping the way we perceive various phenomena and understand the categories associated with them.¹ This can be seen especially in case of the religion and modernity. Many scholars point out that the Enlightenment critique of religion, taking the form of a philosophical narrative, is the source of the “secularization thesis”, according to which the rise of modernity inevitably leads to the decline of faith (CASANOVA 2011, 66–67). The Enlightenment narratives that view religious beliefs as a childhood illusion or superstition from the past lead to distortions in the perception of religious phenomena and as such constitute an obstacle in the study of religion (MARTIN 1965, 169–182).

When we start to analyze religious phenomena, the question arises, however, whether we should completely reject philosophical narratives. This, however, is problematic because the modern condition is inherently historical. Understanding the present predicament requires taking into account the historical processes that have shaped it. Thus, the rejection of erroneous narratives

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must go hand in hand with the effort of re-telling the story of religion and modernity. Philosophical narratives, due to their hermeneutic dimension, are needed to understand the contemporary moral and spiritual condition. Thanks to them we can bring to light the essential features of religious experience, and this could translate into more empirically oriented studies of religion in pluralistic societies. So, if we cannot get rid of the narrative form of self-understanding, the only way to overcome the misconceptions of the relationship between religion and modernity is to offer a better approach, that is, one free from the flaws of competing conceptions. This strategy underpins Charles Taylor's analysis presented in his monumental work *A Secular Age* (2007). By deconstructing the secularization paradigm, Taylor offers his narrative that shows the mutual conditioning (historical and structural) of religion and modernity.

In this connection, one may ask whether the privileging of religion in Taylor's conception does not take place at the expense of negating the autonomy of modern secularity. This interpretation of Taylor's position is proposed by Ian Hunter (2011, 2015, 2017). He argues that Taylor's understanding of secularity—which he calls “the Catholic-disembedding narrative”—is religious and exemplifies ideologically marked “combat concepts” (HUNTER 2015, 3–4). In this view, Taylor's theory would be similar to John Milbank's position, for whom modern secularity constitutes “Christian heresy” (MILBANK 1993, 3). Taylor, therefore, would be an advocate of the theological nature of modernity. The accuracy of such an interpretation seems to be confirmed also by Taylor (2007, 775), who considers his approach to secularity to be complementary to that of Milbank.

In my article, I argue that—contrary to Taylor's statement—the narrative presented in *A Secular Age* cannot be treated as compatible with Milbank's conception.² My claim is that for Taylor modern secularity—despite its historical borrowings from what is religious—has broken away from religious tradition and may not be reduced solely to a derivative phenomenon. Unlike Milbank, Taylor does not deny modern secularity its autonomy, and it is for precisely this reason that their narratives cannot be treated as complementary to each other. In countering Hunter's critique, I show that the philosophical understanding of secularity presented by Taylor cannot be equated with ideologically marked “combat concepts”. The “conditions of belief” analyzed by

² By arguing for the distinctness of Taylor's position in relation to the approach represented by Milbank, I expand significantly upon some of the threads I examined in my *Między wiarą a niewiarą. Charles Taylor o kulturze świeckiej świata zachodniego* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK, 2019).

Taylor indicate the mutual mediation of religion and secularity and as such provide a hermeneutical framework thanks to which one can criticize both the Enlightenment narratives about the triumph of religion over reason and religious visions, which perceive modernity as an essentially theological phenomenon. Referring to the considerations of David Martin, I also draw attention to the heuristic dimension of Taylor's narrative and its importance for the study of religion.

1. IAN HUNTER'S CRITIQUE OF CHARLES TAYLOR'S NARRATIVE OF SECULARIZATION

In Hunter's opinion, the discussion on the status of religion in modern societies is predominantly based on the philosophical-historical concept of secularization that is used to describe an "epochal transition from a society based on religious belief to one based on autonomous human reason" (HUNTER 2015, 1). However, as Hunter argues, if we reject the ideologically marked hermeneutic philosophical narratives and focus on empirical evidence, we will see that the early modern period saw religious life flourishing—not collapsing.

Hunter shows that the historical source of the philosophical concept of secularization is found in the ideological and political disputes waged in nineteenth-century Germany. As a result of the struggle for the shape of the future constitution, it was then that the foundations of the four different philosophical narratives of secularization were formed. The first model, described by Hunter as Kantian or "Protestant-rationalist", perceives the history of religion as a process of progress that consists in the "transformation of religion into a moral philosophy that preserved religious norms" (HUNTER 2015, 23). The second model sees secularization not as a rationalization of religion but as its supersession through science and secular philosophical concepts (HUNTER 2017, 10). According to the third narrative, which Hunter relates to the Hegelian right, secularization consists in a process of the "worldification" (*Verweltlichung*) of religion that leads, on one hand, to the end of Christianity as a confessional religion and, on the other, to the spiritualization or desecularization of state institutions, which were to become the foundation of liberty (HUNTER 2015, 30). The fourth model of secularization emerged from the Hegelian left. In this conception, religion is seen as an alienated form of interpersonal relations, therefore secularization cannot mean anything other than the establishment of truly democratic political structures (HUNTER 2017, 9–10).

Hunter also distinguishes a fifth type of the philosophical narrative of secularization, created in the 20th century through merging the Hegelian right with neo-Thomism. Here, secularization is understood as the “self-alienation of Christianity”, resulting in the severing of the ties that link individuals with the community, nature, and God. The progressive erosion of the old, sacred structures of meaning is seen as the “catastrophic effect of Protestant theology” (HUNTER 2015, 2; 2017, 11). Supporters of this brand of philosophy of history also aspire to overcome secularization by restoring the moral and religious foundations of the political community.

According to Hunter, “the Catholic-disembedding narrative” is very influential today, and its impact can be seen in areas such as social theory, political theology, and philosophical history. Citing Peter Gordon’s (2008) considerations, Hunter argues that Charles Taylor’s conception presented in *A Secular Age* should be included in this model. As Hunter (2017, 17) writes:

Charles Taylor thus combines a “right-Hegelian” conception of history as the self-sublimation of reason, with a Catholic theological conception of Protestantism as a nominalist ‘disembedding’ of transcendental forms from the self, cosmos, and society.

In addition to Taylor, Hunter also considers Alasdair MacIntyre, Brad Gregory, and John Milbank to be the main representatives of this approach.

Hunter formulates several arguments against Taylor. He claims that Taylor’s proposed “Reform Master Narrative” is ideologically and philosophically charged, i.e., it prioritizes general over specific historical facts. Consequently, it is unable to acknowledge the historically documented phenomenon of varying regional forms of the secularization process. Taylor thus presents a “single general history of secularisation”, which then leads to a “single modern condition” (HUNTER 2011, 627). Citing John Pocock, Shmuel Eisenstadt, and David Martin, Hunter sees the validity of the concept of “multiple modernities” and argues that this approach highlights how both particular and contingent factors have shaped various modern societies. Thus, one should not—as Taylor does—perceive modernity in an essentialist manner, i.e., as a fundamentally homogeneous phenomenon that is diverse in appearances only.

A characteristic feature of the modern predicament is the nostalgic sense of losing the old order and the subsequent devaluation of contemporary culture. For Taylor, the rise of secularity is thus a “single linear before-and-after narrative in which the ‘before’ has ... normative priority in relation to the

‘after’” (HUNTER 2011, 638). Taylor, therefore, strives to present an interpretation of modernity in which it appears primarily as a “domain of lost transcendence and community” (638). Treating the rise of modernity as a process of decline puts Taylor on a par with McIntyre’s neo-Thomist conception and simultaneously at odds with the vision of modernity’s emergence as progress that stems from Kantian historiosophy.

According to Hunter, the philosophical nature of Taylor’s narrative is closely related to the way he formulates the main subject of his considerations. In contrast to secularity recognized as the emancipation from the religion of the social midfield and secularity perceived as the decline of religious practice, Hunter argues that Taylor examines secularity understood as “(philosophical) conditions” which led to the epochal “worldlification” of religion (HUNTER 2011, 626). Having recognized the shift in the “conditions of belief”, i.e., changes of a philosophical and theological nature, as the main factor behind the emergence of the current secular age, Taylor falls into reductionism, which consists in refusing to acknowledge political secularization (changes in the field of public law) as possessing an independent driving force. Therefore, according to Hunter, in Taylor’s view, the only causative factor of the secularization process is the sphere of ideas, in particular Protestant theology, preceded by the rise of nominalism and voluntarism (HUNTER 2017, 17). Thus, Taylor’s narrative is also exposed to being charged with idealism, i.e., treating social practices and institutions as secondary to the sphere of ideas.

In Hunter’s opinion, Taylor’s philosophical narrative intends to demonstrate—as is the case with Milbank’s approach—that modernity is profoundly religious. The religious nature of modernity arises not only from the fact that the process that led to its emergence was initiated by theological conceptions but also from religion still constituting—albeit in its secularised (alienated) form—an ingrained part of modernity.

Presenting modernity as an essentially religious phenomenon requires an appropriate method. As Hunter (2017, 19) writes:

I have shown that this disclosure of the hidden presence of alienated religion in secular modernity is incapable of historical truth because it deploys a hermeneutic method—the Hegelian dialectics of self-alienating and self-overcoming reason or spirit—that transforms historical phenomena into symbols rather than evidence, and is at its heart a kind of metaphysical religion.

As noted earlier, according to Hunter, Taylor’s view of the rise of secularism exemplifies a “combat concept”. Therefore, after this part, one should ask

what in Hunter's opinion is Taylor fighting for. By showing the disastrous consequences of Protestantism, Taylor aims to paint a picture that will allow us to notice the ills of modernity, in particular the weaknesses inherent to the conception of a secular state. Thus, the main goal of exposing the weaknesses of political secularism, which is based on a quasi-historical account, is to reject it (HUNTER 2017, 18–19).

3. THE PHILOSOPHICAL DIMENSION OF CHARLES TAYLOR'S ANALYSIS OF SECULARITY

Hunter's reasoning is very indicative and convinces some authors. Peter Harrison (2017, 3) claims that Hunter's term "the Catholic-disembedding narrative" accurately reflects the essential features of Taylor's approach, as well as that of MacIntyre and Gregory. Dominic Erdozain (2017) considers Taylor's narrative of secularization as an example of the ideologically driven "combat concepts" that were criticized by Hunter. According to Erdozain (2017), Taylor relies in his deliberations on a dualistic interpretive scheme that assumes (unjustifiably) a seamless transition from the "religious past" to the "secular present" (74). I agree that applying this type of dualistic scheme to the interpretation of the secularization process is an oversimplification that obscures more than explains. I cannot, however, concur that Taylor's narrative can be regarded as historiosophical. In what follows, I show that Hunter's arguments against Taylor are flawed in most cases. However, I believe that Hunter's critique is worth addressing, as refuting it allows one—by clarifying some elements of Taylor's position—to show the uniqueness of his conception and see how it goes beyond the historiosophical understanding of the secularization process.

Taylor distinguishes three meanings of the secularity concept. In the first sense, secularity refers to the withdrawal of religion from various social spheres. In the second meaning, secularity is concerned with the disappearance of religious practices and the decline in the number of believers. The third meaning of secularity, which reflects Taylor's innovative approach to the issue, points to the "conditions of belief".

One ought to agree with Hunter that the main subject of Taylor's (2007) analysis in *A Secular Age* is the third concept of secularity. When speaking about "conditions of belief", Taylor is referring to the wide variety of factors that shape the moral-spiritual experience. He claims that "an age or society

would then be secular or not, in virtue of the conditions of experience of and search for the spiritual” (3). To describe this dimension of secularity, the Canadian thinker also uses the term “context of understanding”. Just as the meaning of certain words can change depending on the context, the wider background also gives meaning to our experiences. Taylor thus seeks to grasp belief and unbelief from the perspective of the “lifeworld” (*lebenswelt*), i.e., the pre-theoretical way of experiencing reality (SMITH 2002, 2; ABBEY 2000, 199–200; STOREY 2009, 183; CASANOVA 2010, 265–66).

According to Taylor, there is a significant difference in the way we experience belief in supernatural reality between people living in medieval Europe and those living in the modern Western world. This difference is the result of profound cultural changes that have caused the disappearance of the old context of understanding and the emergence of a new one. Thus, Taylor’s main task is to examine the various processes that have taken place in our civilization over the last five centuries that have led to a change in the conditions of belief. As Taylor (2007, 3) writes:

I believe that an examination of this age as secular is worth taking up in a third sense, closely related to the second, and not without connection to the first. This would focus on the conditions of belief. The shift to secularity in this sense consists, among other things, of a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.... Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives.

Thus, the Western world is, as Taylor argues, secular not only in the first and second meanings of the term, but above all, the third concerning the conditions of belief. It should be added here that contemporary conditions of belief are not confined to religious people. The context of understanding determines a common situation for both religious and non-religious people.

An analysis of the conditions of belief must take into account the “social imaginary” that is dominant in a given epoch. Referring to Benedict Anderson’s (1991) and Bronisław Baczko’s (1984) output, Taylor utilizes this concept to describe the collective perception of social space which conditions common practices and imbues them with meaning. The social imaginary concerns large numbers of people and is not, like the social theory, the domain of a select group of specialists. It is not merely a collection of ideas, but something more fundamental to both ideas and their associated practices. In other

words, social imaginary is part of the primary to our beliefs context of understanding. As Taylor (2004, 23) argues:

By social imaginary, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, 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 social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.

Therefore, as Taylor (2010, 307) states, studying the changes that take place in the social imaginary coincides with the history of mentality.

According to Taylor, the contemporary conditions of belief are significantly circumscribed by moral and spiritual pluralism. The breakthrough event in the process of shaping the contemporary predicament was the emergence of “exclusive humanism” during the Enlightenment. By this term, Taylor understands a group of conceptions and resulting life attitudes that reject the existence of goals that go beyond human flourishing. The clash between the traditional understanding of man, which is based on the notion of a higher reality, and its secular rival gives rise to new positions—both religious and non-religious. Taylor refers to this process of progressive pluralism in the spiritual sphere as the “nova effect”. From approximately the latter half of the twentieth century, the “fractured” culture of the elites began to spread to the lower social strata of society. “The ethics of authenticity” played an extremely important role in changing common sensitivity. As calls to find one’s spiritual path spread, the process of pluralization increased in scope and intensity. As a result, “We are now living in a spiritual super-nova, a kind of galloping pluralism on the spiritual plane” (TAYLOR 2007, 300).

The rise of a secular age does not mean that masses of people abandon their faith and become declared atheists. If this were in fact Taylor’s thesis, it would have to be considered an absurdity. For there is a whole gamut of intermediate positions between belief and unbelief. Taylor shows that alongside the declining trends of the various dimensions of religiosity, we are dealing with the emergence of new forms of belief that respond to the changing socio-cultural background of religion.

According to Taylor (2003b, 106–7), the process of the proliferation of the “spiritual super-nova” among the public has had multiple consequences. Firstly, there has been the spread of a trend that Grace Davie (2007, 138–40) has described as “believing without belonging”. This phenomenon is that many people, despite abandoning religious practices and church membership, continue to believe in God. Secondly, there is a growing number of people who believe but remain outside of traditional, institutional religion. Increasingly, the object of faith is not a personal God, but, for example, an impersonal cosmic force or an all-pervading spirit of nature, etc. This is linked to the popularisation of other religions, for example Eastern religions, and the emergence of new forms of spirituality associated with the New Age movement. In this context, José Casanova (2006, 65) writes about “*unchurching* of the European population and of religious individualization”. In the same vein is Karel Dobbelaere (2004, 178) who argues that “individual secularization is not only about *decline* of religiosity, it is also about *changes, shifts, or transformations of the authority structure of the beliefs and practices* one holds”. Fourthly, one can speak of an increase in eclectic attitudes and selective treatment of the credal truths. Many young people consider themselves Catholic but disagree with the Church’s position on premarital intercourse, for example. Thomas Luckmann used the apt phrase “religious bricolage” to describe the phenomenon of selecting and mixing different religious threads; other terms to describe these include: “religion *à la carte*” or “patchwork religion” (DOBBELAERE 2004, 176). Finally, fifthly, there has been an increase in the percentage of non-religious or atheists.

Under the conditions of modernity, religion is therefore one of the elements of a diverse moral landscape. The multiplicity of available life paths makes faith lose its former “phenomenological status of unquestioned fact” and become optional and therefore problematic (TAYLOR 1989, 17). The emergence of modern conditions of belief thus entails a fundamental transformation that results in belief in a supernatural reality ceasing to be taken for granted and becoming one of the many options on the table. As Taylor (2010, 307) writes:

The central target that I am trying to track is the change in the conditions of belief, which I call “secularity 3”. The crucial features concern whether an issue arises about belief, and if so, in what terms and in what context? ... The “conditions” in this sense are a matter of *experience*, the way these matters present themselves even prior to any articulation or reflection.

It should be kept in mind that Taylor's position on pluralism cannot be equated with the concept put forward by Peter Berger and Anton Zijderveld (2009). According to these authors, modern reflexivity makes the subject's identification with his or her professed beliefs increasingly provisional and essentially weaker compared to pre-modernity. Taylor (2007, 833–34) disagrees with this view. In his opinion, reflexivity does not necessarily weaken our beliefs, but can strengthen them. The beliefs of those who reflectively examine their convictions can gain in depth and durability. Pluralism, therefore, need not be a threat to religious beliefs, but can be an opportunity to develop and deepen them through creative confrontation with differing positions.

Besides pluralism, "immanence" is another essential feature of the contemporary conditions of belief. According to Taylor, references to the supernatural appeared in virtually every area of life in medieval Europe. Collective notions about communal order, the nature of good and evil, and the flow of events were intertwined with the supernatural order. This "familiarity with sacred things"—to use Johan Huizinga's (1978) phrase—constituted a medieval man's practical relationship with the world. Defining the contemporary condition using the notion of immanence, Taylor points to a shift in common sensitivity which results in the majority of the members of Western societies perceiving various orders (political, social, moral) as self-sufficient, that is, requiring virtually no reference to the supernatural. The profound cultural transformations that led to the emergence of immanent order were founded on the dismantling of the old enchanted hierarchical visions of political community and the invention of new concepts concerning human agency and society. As Taylor (2007, 543) notes,

we come to understand our lives as taking place within a self-sufficient immanent order; or better, a constellation of orders, cosmic, social and moral.... the life of the buffered individual, instrumentally effective in secular time, created the practical context within which the self-sufficiency of this immanent realm could become a matter of experience.

However, there are several points to bear in mind with Taylor's notion of immanence. First, "the immanent frame" by no means excludes religious experience. Taylor (2007, 543–44) repeatedly emphasized that it is intrinsically undecided, which means it can be experienced as "closed" or "open" to what transcends it. Secondly, "the immanent frame" is something more primary than our beliefs: it marks a background understanding or a common ground

for different worldviews, and therefore for both belief and unbelief. This is an important caveat as Hunter (2011, 626), when writing about Taylor's immanence, speaks as if it pertained to the area of beliefs, in particular to people who reject faith. In other words, Hunter mistakenly equates the perspective of "closure" with immanence. Third, secularity understood in this fashion is the result of new inventions in both theory and practice, and it cannot be understood in terms of the secularization of originally theological content.

Thus, we see that secularity in the Taylorian sense does not boil down to a "modern epoch of unbelief"; instead, it constitutes a dynamic and tense coexistence of belief and unbelief. Nor can it be understood as "the domain of lost transcendence": it must be understood as a redefinition of the conditions of religious experience. Despite using the phrase "the world we have lost" when discussing the process of "disenchantment of the world", Taylor's position on this matter is quite different. He repeatedly emphasized that the rise of modernity is a process that consists not in the collapse of false beliefs but in "transforming sensitivity" (TAYLOR 2010, 307).

The philosophical dimension of Taylor's analyses is mainly determined by his efforts to articulate the changes that define the "lived experience". Robert Bellah (2007) sees the novelty of Taylor's analyses and describes the phenomenological dimension of secularity he studies as "secularism of a new kind". Bellah also notes that the Taylorian conception of secularity occupies a different level than sociological and political secularization. Taylor himself claims that changes in the conditions of belief are foundational for secularity which is understood as the decline of belief and religious practices.

Does this mean, as Hunter would want it to, that Taylor reduces political and sociological secularization to changes in the philosophical realm? As for the relationship between sociological secularization and changes in the conditions of belief, Taylor only states the simple fact that the collapse of religious belief must be preceded by the emergence of a secular vision of man. People who give up their belief do not get lost in an axiological vacuum: they accept a non-religious worldview together with its core values. The change in the conditions of belief, which consists in the emergence of a secular option as an alternative to religion, enables sociological secularization to occur. This kind of secularization, however, remains a separate dimension that cannot be reduced to alterations in the conditions of belief. There are examples of societies that exhibit high levels of religiosity but in which unbelief appears as a "living option" (Poland, USA).

As for the relation between political secularization and the conditions of belief, I cannot agree with Hunter (2011, 626), who says that Taylor “retrospectively imposes the model of nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophical history onto early modern public-law political secularity”. This is due to at least two reasons. First, the emergence of modern conditions of belief indeed marks a fundamental cultural change for Taylor. However, it has nothing to do with the “epochal secularization of consciousness” that leads to a mass decline of faith. When speaking of secularity in the philosophical sense, Taylor means not so much the object of belief as the way of experiencing moral and spiritual content. The concept of secularity used by Taylor cannot by any means be equated with the concept of secularization which came up in the discourse of nineteenth-century German historiosophists, i.e., secularization understood as the “worldlification” of religion as a result of a dialectical process. Secondly, not only does Taylor not reduce political secularization to a change in the conditions of belief—contrary to Hunter’s interpretation—he also argues that the emancipation of socio-political structures from religion has contributed to the creation of modern conditions of belief. As Taylor (2007, 4) states, “I will maintain that, in the Western case, the shift to public secularity has been part of what helped to bring on a secular age in my third sense.”

4. NARRATIVE: CONTINGENCY, MEANING, AND FACTS

I will now turn to discussing the method used by Taylor. One of the critical elements of his research approach is involved with the notion of narrative. He argues the present condition is inherently historical. This means that the past serves as an important (negative or positive) point of reference for modern identity. Thus, if we set ourselves the goal of understanding the present situation—which is precisely the main aim of Taylor’s analysis in *A Secular Age*—we first have to determine the nature of the processes behind its emergence. Taylor, like Hegel before him, believes that the present is “sedimented” in the past; however, as I will try to prove, this by no means indicates that he also accepts the Hegelian dialectics of history.

The narrative nature of modern self-understanding makes it vulnerable to distortions arising from misinterpretations of its historical determinants. A common misconception regarding the emergence of modernity takes the form of the so-called “secularization thesis”, which presupposes the existence of a close relationship between modernity and the atrophy of religion. Taylor is

strongly opposed to this approach. In his *Apologia pro Libro suo* (2010), which serves as a response to various critics, he states that overcoming the secularization thesis was one of his main goals in writing *A Secular Age*. At the same time, Taylor notices that it is not enough to only criticize the secularization thesis: instead, one must also propose a competing and thus “better” narrative of the emergence of modernity.

Taylor agrees with the proponents of the “orthodox” secularization model (e.g., Steve Bruce) in that modernization (urbanization, industrialization, the development of modern science) has had a negative impact on traditional religion by destabilizing the social matrices in which belief was rooted. However, by rejecting the conviction concerning the close relationship between modernity and the decline of religion, Taylor demonstrates—counter to the supporters of the secularization theory—how new forms of religion replace the old ones and fit into the modern order. This includes, for example, the fusion of religion with collective identities that constitute the backbone of modern nation-states, or the typically modern, voluntary, and non-political religious associations that exist within American denominationalism.

Steve Bruce (1996, 96) believes the binding of religious themes to national identity gives religion a secondary, epiphenomenal status. Wherever religion plays the role of “cultural defence”, there is a loss of genuinely religious motivation, which confirms the validity of the secularisation thesis. Disagreeing with Bruce’s position, Taylor (2007, 459) argues that the merging of the religious with the non-religious does not necessarily imply a weakening of faith. Recourse to religious symbols to express nationally significant events does not necessarily imply the instrumentalization of religion; on the contrary, it can be an expression of sincere faith. Accordingly, Hunter’s opinion that Taylor is unable to discern the development of religion in modern societies is untenable. It is precisely Taylor’s sensitivity to the way religion is present in modernity that allows him to demonstrate the one-sidedness of the secularization thesis.

John Milbank (2010, 55) aptly notes that “Taylor’s stance on secularization is basically that it is not inevitable but that it has occurred.” By emphasizing the contingency of the current moral and spiritual situation, Taylor rejects the narrative which views the process of the emergence of modernity as a linear history of regression in belief. Instead of this misconception, he proposes viewing the emergence of secularity using the notion of a zig-zag. As Taylor (2007, 95) writes, “The straight path account of modern secularity can’t be sustained. Instead what I’m offering here is a zig-zag account, one full of un-

intended consequences.” In Taylor’s understanding, the birth of the secular age—essentially dictated not by the decline of religion but by pluralism—is rooted in a series of extremely complex multi-directional changes whose result was impossible to predict. In light of these remarks, the words of Hunter, who by criticizing Taylor sketched his view of history, are nothing short of baffling. Hunter (2011, 638) writes that the “spectacle of multiple or rival modernities can only point to the fact that history has no fundamental sense of direction, suggesting that the present is better approached as a domain of unfinished struggles and *unintended outcomes*” (emphasis mine).

Let us consider another matter. Does Taylor’s narrative ignore or contradict facts? In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor describes his inquiries as hermeneutic and distinguishes them from analyses aimed at historical explanation. When trying to explain a given historical event, we point to various factors (economic, political, demographic, etc.) that contributed to it. On the other hand, when examining historical changes, a hermeneutic approach focuses on human motivation and tries to determine why certain ideas about human agency, morality, and social order have become “convincing/inspiring/moving” (TAYLOR 1989, 203).

Taylor thinks that hermeneutics not only does not exclude a historical explanation but also cannot ignore it. This is because the human inner self, which is the area of our motivations, is not a closed space that tightly isolates us from all social conditions. Determining what has meaning for an individual must rely on considerations within the scope of historical explanation. Moreover, according to Taylor, hermeneutical deliberations become necessary if we want to explain the origin of certain conceptions. This stems from the fact that a credible and convincing description of some historical phenomena presupposes their prior understanding.

Therefore, Taylorian hermeneutics does not entail ignoring facts, nor does it entail history actualizing an objective *telos* through a dialectic process. Terry Pinkard (2004, 200) rightly points out that in Taylor’s terms,

Philosophical history cannot challenge the facts of empirical history, and it must be consistent with them; its task, though, is different in that it looks at the meaning of history.... Such philosophical history need not recount all the contingencies of history that go to make up the story we now tell about it. The story that it does tell, though, cannot be predetermined; there is nothing in the makeup of things or of agents (on Taylor’s view) that determines that all transitions will be rational.

By focusing on the realm of meaning and facts relevant to the phenomena under examination, Taylor calls his approach a “master narrative”. He defines it as a “broad framework picture of how history unfolds” (TAYLOR 2007, 573). Because the notion of “Reform” plays the main heuristic role in his considerations, Taylor describes his approach as the “Reform Master Narrative”.

5. DISENCHANTMENT OF THE WORLD: BEYOND THEOLOGY

Now I would like to outline the main threads of Taylor’s “Reform Master Narrative”. The crucial question in this context is whether it can be considered complementary to Milbank’s narrative. If it can, Hunter’s critique of Taylor is largely correct.

“Reform” is the main category that unifies the Taylorian interpretation of the process behind the emergence of modern secularity. When speaking of Reform, Taylor (2007, 242–44) has in mind the very broad sense of the word, by which he means a slew of top-down and bottom-up actions aimed at transforming the lives of large parts of society based on standards that reformers consider higher than those generally applicable. The most original context for Reform is the tension born in the “Axial Age” (e.g. EISENSTADT 1986)—the tension between religious life based on the notion of human well-being and belief in the existence of a transcendent human good. In the medieval world, the strain between the transcendent and the mundane was alleviated, among others, using a distinction between a zealous religious minority (clergy) and an earthly religious majority (laity). By rejecting this kind of solution, which was based on the notion, as Taylor calls it, of “hierarchical complementarity”, Reform seeks to impose high religious standards on all believers. An important element of this process can be found in the development of “personal religion” as internal forms of piety undermine the pre-Axial elements of religion, leading to its demagicalization, deritualization, and desacralization. As a result of actions that introduce uniform standards of piety, the *saeculum* is revalued because the secular sphere is no longer treated with contempt but becomes a fully-fledged place for achieving religious excellence.

In Taylor’s opinion, Latin Christendom has been marked by a long march towards Reform. In institutional terms, the march was initiated in the 11th century through the Gregorian Reform (TAYLOR 2007; MACCULLOCH 2003; O’MALLEY 2000). One of the goals behind reorganizing church structures and educating priests was to increase the level of piety among broad groups of

believers. The next significant event mentioned here by Taylor is the Lateran Council of 1215. In the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, Reform not only gained strength but also expanded the scope of its impact. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the actions of both Protestant and Catholic reformers began to also cover secular aspects of life. Thereby, Reform intermingled with the Renaissance ideal of “civility” (BRYSON 1998; ELIAS 2000). The actions of religious and secular reformers ultimately led to the emergence of a new, disenchanted order, with particular emphasis placed on disciplined, orderly, and productive life (TAYLOR 2005, 90–146). According to Taylor, this order was first brought to life in Protestant England and the Netherlands; it then appeared in Germany as a *Polizeistaat*, and in France, where the Counter-Reformation was the driving force behind it (TAYLOR 2010, 305). The theoretical expression of this order is found in the conception of a “modern moral order”, whose basic foundations can be found in the works of John Locke and Hugo Grotius (TAYLOR 2004). According to this view, free and rational individuals first and foremost aim to pursue temporal goals through peaceful cooperation, thus implementing God’s plan. In the second half of the 18th century, Taylor notes, “naturalized” and “anti-religious” versions of this order come to the fore. The conception of a modern moral order started expanding beyond the narrow circle of elites and, with time, went on to become a pillar of the contemporary social imaginary in the Western world. The modern moral order created a context that brought about an “anthropocentric shift” (TAYLOR 2007, 221–24) in deistic concepts. This shift, which consisted in equating the religious (fulfilling God’s will) with the secular (striving for happiness), paved the way for “exclusive humanism”, which rejects the existence of any goals beyond human well-being (TAYLOR 2007, 774).

Therefore, one must ask whether viewing the emergence of modern secularism through the framework of Reform does not imply that Taylor has entirely reduced modernity to the religious. This is how Hunter interprets Taylor’s position. In his opinion, Taylor ascribes the role of the overarching driving force behind “disciplinary society” to theology. According to this approach, the rise of nominalism and voluntarism as a counter-proposal to realism led to the world order ceasing to be perceived as anchored in nature and beginning to appear to be completely derivative—first in relation to God’s will and, consequently, also to human will. This trait of Taylor’s narrative testifies to its “neo-Thomist” (HUNTER 2011, 629) nature and places it on equal footing with the view presented by Radical Orthodoxy. Hunter notices, however, that such an understanding is wrong since it results in an unjustified reduction of the

factors responsible for the emergence of disciplinary society to theological transformations.

At the end of *A Secular Age*, entitled *Epilogue: The Many Stories*, Taylor goes over his research approach against the backdrop of conceptions that recognize the nominalist revolution or Duns Scotus' voluntarist theology as the sources of modern secularity. Taylor calls these theories the "Intellectual Deviation Story" and includes Hans Blumenberg and Milbank in this category (TAYLOR 2007, 773–74). When critiquing Blumenberg for repeating the "subtraction story" fallacy (2007, 294), Taylor does not shy away from his sympathy for Milbank's position. According to Taylor, the significance of Milbank's work lies in allowing us to see the connection between theology and modernity. These inquiries, however, focus on the realm of ideas and thus cannot form a foundation for understanding cultural changes that affect mass society—and this is precisely the purpose of Taylor's narrative. Ultimately, as Taylor puts it, the Reform Master Narrative and the Intellectual Deviation Story (Milbank's version) complement each other, i.e., they explore "different sides of the same mountain" (2007, 775).

Taylor's position met with an enthusiastic response from Milbank. In an article devoted to *A Secular Age*, he notes that the book's main themes fit in with the agenda of radical orthodoxy (MILBANK 2010, 55). When analyzing the presented approach to the demagicalization of the world, Milbank claims that Taylor "is highly alert to the fact that disenchantment perhaps primarily came about because a certain style of *theology* favored this: a style wishing to monopolize all mystery in the one God" (2010, 58).

In Taylor's view, nominalist theology stands as an important point of reference. He claims that nominalism, among other things, has contributed to the undermining of the conception of the cosmic order as embodying objective meanings and creating an instrumental attitude towards the world. It does not follow, however, that Taylor considers theology as the overriding factor in the process of disenchanting the world. In his opinion, Renaissance themes—which cannot be reduced to religion—also played a crucial role. This is particularly the case with the ideal of civility that emphasized the role of the volitional factor in the lives of both individuals and societies together with the neo-Stoic ethics of discipline. Taylor (2007, 99) clearly points out that, in addition to theological threads, "there were other forces pushing towards this redefinition of human agency in instrumental terms;... This new humanism has deep roots in the Renaissance era, which dovetail with but are partly independent of religious belief."

It can thus be seen that, in terms of the emergence of a disciplined, disenchanting order, Taylor recognizes the importance of factors of a non-theological nature. Consequently, his position differs importantly from Milbank's conception and the interpretation proposed by Hunter.

6. THE RISE OF MODERN SECULARITY: CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY

The next crucial difference between Milbank and Taylor concerns the status of modern secularity. In line with Milbank's position, modern secularity is descended from late medieval theological transformations, especially from Duns Scotus' doctrine of "univocity of being". According to Milbank (1993, 9), secularity is profoundly religious and cannot be understood as a residue of the decline of faith in God. Nevertheless, modern discourse strongly conceals its genetic and structural dependence on Christianity, thus becoming, as Milbank puts it, "antitheology in disguise" (1993, 3). Modern secularity, therefore, constitutes "Christian heresy" (OLIVER 2009; SMITH 2004) because it is based on a distortion of religious content. Milbank states that "secular discourse does not just borrow inherently inappropriate modes of expression from religion..., but is actually constituted in its secularity by 'heresy' in relation to orthodox Christianity" (MILBANK 1993, 3).

As for Taylor, he perceives the rise of modern secularity as the result of a *reinterpretation* of certain values present in religious tradition. This reinterpretation includes elements of both continuity and discontinuity and cannot be reduced to just one of them. In other words, Taylor distances himself from any one-sided narrative of secularity that sees its origins as either a radical break with the past (popular Enlightenment narratives) or as a (ineffective) transformation of Christianity.

Taylor's approach is clearly visible in his description of the birth of "exclusive humanism", whose foundation lies in the immanent vision of human "fullness", i.e., concepts that describe "our highest moral capacity and inspiration, without reference to God" (TAYLOR 2007, 245). The continuation of religious themes in the case of exclusive humanism embodied, among others, the affirmation of the basic values of the modern moral order ("the ethics of freedom and mutual benefits") as well as the acceptance of universalist ethics, which in Taylor's opinion constituted "the historical trace of agape" (2007, 247). When considering the emergence of Enlightenment humanism from the

perspective of its break from traditional religion, Taylor insistently emphasizes that secular visions of fullness are based on original anthropological concepts and that their emergence cannot be viewed as a simple translation of religious content into secular language. Having highlighted the novelty of immanent concepts of fullness, Taylor notes that their articulation marked a breakthrough not only in the sphere of moral theory but also in the practical dimension, which concerns moral experience.

It must therefore be stated that, for Taylor, modern secularity—despite its historical borrowings from what is religious—breaks away from religious tradition and may not be reduced solely to a derivative phenomenon. Unlike Milbank, Taylor does not deny modern secularity its autonomy. Taylor's position undergoes a similar interpretation by Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (2010, 6), the editors of a book devoted to the critical analysis of *A Secular Age*. They state that:

the secular in Taylor's narrative is not a mask over hidden theology. Taylor does often point to the spiritual motives that have led to unforeseen transformations in religious traditions and their alternatives; but these are real transformations, and Taylor does not regard the resulting displacement of religious tradition as illusory.

Therefore, I believe, the narratives on the emergence of modernity presented by Taylor and Milbank cannot be treated as complementary to each other.

Finally, I would like to address two other points that Hunter holds against Taylor. The first concerns the supposedly homogeneous nature of the "Reform Master Narrative", which makes it incompatible with the concept of "multiple modernities". This concept can, I believe, be considered in two respects: as the differentiation of modernity on a global scale, and also as the internal differentiation of Western modernity. Taylor recognizes the differentiation of modernity in both of these. As for the first one, Taylor, like Eisenstadt (2000), rejects the once popular thesis about the convergence of societies undergoing modernization, as well as the view concerning the exemplary role of the European program. Moreover, he argues, it is the study of secularity—which is the hallmark of Western modernity—that confirms this belief (TAYLOR 2004, 195). Taylor's narrative also takes into account the internal differentiation of Western modernity. Based on David Martin's (1978, 1990, 2005) deliberations, Taylor (2003b, 70–71) makes a distinction between the two main paths that led to the present situation: the "Catholic" and the "Protestant". The Cath-

olic path includes the societies of the Old Continent. Compared to the Protestant path, it was bumpier and led, among others, through the bloody events of the French Revolution. The drama involved with this path was related to the old hierarchical understanding of order and its “ontic dependence” on God being prevalent in Catholic societies for a considerably longer period. The Protestant path was much milder and primarily concerned the Anglo-Saxon cultural circle. Its peculiarity was shaped by the relatively quick spread of the modern concept of moral order in Great Britain and the United States, which resulted in hostility towards its older conceptions.

The last issue I would like to address is Taylor’s assessment of modernity. Contrary to Hunter’s claims, Taylor (2003a) is not a staunch critic of modernity—nor is he an ardent defender of it. Taylor presents a significantly ambivalent interpretation of modernity. He sees its threats as well as the benefits it carries. As for the latter, Taylor demonstrates how the modern codified order leads to social atomism, instrumentalization of nature and body, and a “loss of meaning”. According to him, the “metaphysical primacy of life” (1999, 27–29) that is inherent to modern culture also brings about a reaction in the form of a fascination with death and violence. When it comes to the benefits associated with the emergence of secular culture, Taylor points to the widespread moral ideals of equality and freedom, which underpin the concept of human rights and liberal-democratic secular states. Contrary to Hunter’s opinion, Taylor’s narrative cannot be described as lapsarian. Taylor (1999, 29) distances himself from the position that the “whole move to secular humanism was just a mistake, which needs to be undone”. He argues that while modern rights culture still wrestles with numerous problems, it puts us in a better position compared to the world of Latin Christianity. It should be noted here that Hunter is also wrong to see Taylor as an opponent of political secularism. While rejecting certain forms of political secularism (those in which desperately clinging to the institutional principle of separation of state and religion ultimately violates the freedom and equality of citizens), Taylor advocates “open secularism” (TAYLOR and MACLURE 2011; TAYLOR 2011), i.e., a model of a secular state whose ultimate goal is to ensure freedom of conscience for both believers and unbelievers.

CONCLUSION

In his book *On Secularization. Towards a Revised General Theory*, David Martin (2005) greatly compliments the work of Charles Taylor, who wrote the preface to this book. Martin (2005, 1–2) writes: “My often-repeated concern about the gap between accounts of secularization seen from a philosophical viewpoint and standard sociological accounts was less relevant that it had been. Charles Taylor was bridging the gap and the pontoons were, so to speak, meeting in the middle. Progress was actually being made in a field that sometimes seemed to comprise endless revisiting.” I share Martin’s opinion. The philosophical understanding of secularity as the “conditions of belief” present in Taylor’s deliberations not only goes beyond the historiosophical approach to secularization, which was rightly criticized by Hunter, but is also characterized by a strong heuristic and—when looking from a slightly different perspective—conciliatory merit. Articulating the changes in the conditions of belief that led to the emergence of secular culture, Taylor points to a vast range of factors (moral, social, political) underlying the contemporary moral and spiritual condition. By revealing the historical sources of contemporary pluralism, he not only shows the contingency of its composing positions but also the interconnection of belief and unbelief. In turn, by presenting belief and unbelief from the perspective of lived experience (“human fullness”), Taylor draws attention to the moral attractiveness of these stances. In this way, Taylorian hermeneutics establishes a platform for mutual understanding.

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MODERNITY AND RELIGION:
BEYOND THE PHILOSOPHICAL NARRATIVES OF SECULARISATION AND BACK

Summary

The subject of the article is the philosophical narratives of secularization and their importance for the study of religion in modern society. I am focusing in particular on Charles Taylor's narrative presented in his monumental *A Secular Age*. Contrary to some of Taylor's critics, especially Ian Hunter, I argue that the philosophical approach to secularity presented by the Canadian thinker cannot be equated with ideologically marked "combat concepts" that characterize the emergence of modernity as a result of either the overcoming of religion by autonomous reason or as the "self-alienation of Christianity". The "conditions of belief" analyzed by Taylor indicate the mutual mediation of religion and secularity and provide a hermeneutical framework thanks to which we can criticize both the Enlightenment narratives about the triumph of religion over reason and religious visions, which perceive modernity as a theological phenomenon in its essence (John Milbank). Referring to David Martin's considerations, I also draw attention to the heuristic dimension of Taylor's narrative and its relevance to the research on religion.

Keywords: Charles Taylor; Ian Hunter; modernity; religion; secularization; philosophical narratives

NOWOCZESNOŚĆ I RELIGIA:
WOKÓŁ FILOZOFICZNYCH NARRACJI SEKULARYZACJI

Streszczenie

Przedmiotem moich rozważań są filozoficzne narracje sekularyzacji i ich znaczenie dla badań nad religią we współczesnym społeczeństwie. Skupiam się w szczególności na koncepcji świeckości zaproponowanej przez Charlesa Taylora w jego monumentalnym dziele *A Secular Age*. W przeciwieństwie do niektórych krytyków Taylora, zwłaszcza Iana Huntera, argumentuję, że filozoficzne podejście do świeckości przedstawione przez kanadyjskiego myśliciela nie może być utożsamiane z ideologicznie nacechowanymi wizjami sekularyzacji, które charakteryzują pojawienie się nowoczesności jako rezultat przewyciężenia religii przez autonomiczny rozum lub jako „samalienację chrześcijaństwa”. Analizowane przez Taylora „warunki wiary” wskazują na wzajemne zapośredniczenie religii i świeckości oraz dostarczają hermeneutycznych ram, dzięki którym możemy odnieść się krytycznie zarówno do oświeceniowych opowieści o triumfie religii nad rozumem, jak i religijnych wizji, postrzegających nowoczesność jako zjawisko w swej istocie teologiczne (John Milbank). Odwołując się do rozważań Davida Martina, zwracam również uwagę na heurystyczny wymiar narracji Taylora i jej znaczenie dla badań nad religią.

Słowa kluczowe: Charles Taylor; Ian Hunter; nowoczesność; religia; filozoficzne narracje sekularyzacji