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PROJECT

Living in a Secular Age

This is an attempt both to define what we in the West mean by "secularity" (not a single thing in fact, but I'm going to try to distinguish the different senses), and to explain how we got there. These two issues, the definitional and the historical, are inextricably intertwined.

Recommended Reading

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1989.

- *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

- *Philosophical Arguments*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Secularization Theory: Science or Ideology?

There is a widely shared perception of the modern age in the West as "secular". Underlying this is a story of how secularism arose, and a causal hypothesis about why it did so. This causal hypothesis is what I will call "Mainstream Secularization theory". The basic thesis, in a nutshell, is that Modernity brings secularization.

The former term covers a host of developments we consider constitutive of modernity: Mobility, economic growth, industrialization, higher education levels, science and technology, social and geographical mobility, urbanization, globalization, means of mass communication.

The latter term covers mainly two things: a) religion ceases to dominate public sphere, and so becomes "privatized"; b) religious belief and practice falls off.

Many critics, and particularly José Casanova here a few weeks ago, have shown the distortions and oversimplifications involved in this theory.

What I want to do is to focus on the stories involved in this mainstream theory. It draws on a family of Master Narratives.

Master Narratives. According to some contemporary thinkers (e.g., J-F Lyotard), we are supposed to get beyond reliance on Master Narratives. But I think we cannot do without them. There are only the alternatives of a) attempting to articulate and justify/correct one's Master Narrative, or b) leave it as part of one's "unthought".

I want to look into the following facets the Master Narratives of secularization, and the problems which arise from them:

1. The deep background in the self-narrations of Western modernity: stadial theories; ratchet effects.
2. What is religion?
3. Confusing religion and "enchantment"
4. "Subtraction" theories. The view from Dover Beach.

Then I want to look at some features of the history we have lived through which have been occluded or distorted by the mainstream theory:

1. One story or many?
2. A story not of subtraction, but of destabilization and recomposition.
3. The "Durkheimian" dimension: paleo-, neo- and post-Durkheim.
4. The future of the religious past.

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FELLOW LIBRARY

Taylor, Charles M. (Cambridge, Mass.,2011)

Dilemmas and connections : selected essays

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Taylor, Charles M. (Cambridge, Mass.,2007)

A secular age

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1608681955>

Taylor, Charles M. (Cambridge [u.a.],2004)

Sources of the self : the making of the modern identity

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=669194417>

Taylor, Charles M. (Durham, N.C.,2004)

Modern social imaginaries

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=669193984>

Public Planet Books

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Taylor, Charles M. (Cambridge, Mass. [u.a.],2003)

Varieties of religion today : William James revisited

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=375197664>

Institute for Human Sciences Vienna lecture series

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