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THE SECULAR FOUNDATIONS OF LIBERAL MULTICULTURALISM

by

MOHAMMAD OWAIS KHAN

Under the Direction of Andrew Altman

ABSTRACT

In pursuit of a just political order, Will Kymlicka has defended a liberal conception of multiculturalism. The persuasive appeal of his argument, like that of secular-liberalism more generally, is due to presenting liberalism as a neutral and universal political project. Utilizing Charles Taylor's genealogy of 'exclusive humanism' in *A Secular Age*, this thesis attempts to re-read Kymlicka in order to make certain theological commitments in his work explicit. Here I argue that Kymlicka, in order to make his conception of multiculturalism plausible, relies on a theologically-thick and controversial humanism operating under secular conditions of belief. By committing himself to a particular conception of the human and specific conditions of belief, Kymlicka's liberal multiculturalism is rendered provincially incoherent because it fails to treat in a neutral manner certain theological commitments.

INDEX WORDS: Will Kymlicka, Tolerance, Liberalism, Charles Taylor, Secularization, Multiculturalism

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To Ami and Abu for their love and support

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1. INTRODUCTION

In late medieval and Renaissance Christendom, radical social and political changes in the West eventually led to the Enlightenment and its replacement of Christian political ideology with competing forms of secular political philosophy. A growing number of contemporary theorists privilege the Enlightenment as *the* historical moment that opened a new Western social imagination that constituted the context in which these secular philosophies developed.[1] Certain Enlightenment thinkers challenged deeply held assumptions about the role of religious beliefs in politics in order to lay foundations for a new political order. After World War II, modern liberalism, for reasons beyond the scope of this paper, became the secular ideology of choice among Western democratic states. An important contributing factor to its popularity is liberalism's perpetual ability to present itself as more reasonable than traditional political theologies. One liberal strategy has been to defend liberal political philosophy on the basis of theological neutrality, e.g liberalism regards any and all theological reasons as incapable in the political realm. Only theologically-neutral "secular" reasons have legitimate place in politics, thereby leaving the state free to pursue its proper purposes notwithstanding the theological disagreements that divide society. Or so liberalism would have it.

In this paper I explore the plausibility of characterizing liberal political philosophy as neutral in regards to theology. I choose recent calls for liberal multiculturalism as the prism through which to explore this claim. I argue that under the veneer of neutrality, certain arguments for liberal multiculturalism actually rely on a controversial historical narrative that

[1] I borrow this term from Charles Taylor. What I mean by a 'secular imaginary' is a kind of conceptual scheme that is an unchallenged aspect of modernity. I will explain this in more detail later, but for now let me say that it is largely prelogical, prephilosophical and prelinguistic—thus, it embraces us before conscious belief. This term is not synonymous with metaphysics but much of what is deemed part of a 'social imagination' is traditionally the concern of the branch of philosophy known as metaphysics.

often gets overlooked under what is presupposed as 'unobjectionable'. Accounting for the narrative of modern liberalism unmasks how *liberal political beliefs can presuppose specifically secular conditions of belief,* thereby overturning a long held assumption among liberals that they are doing "political philosophy" rather than mere "theology". In light of new investigations into the secular, theorists cease to see the secular as an innocently neutral space, but rather as a profoundly theological construction. This scholarship has revealed a profoundly complicated picture between the secular and the religious. It is now possible to see that a political philosophy which assumes secular conditions of belief is hardly one that can claim theological impartiality. This is primarily because secular conditions of belief embody a particular historical narrative emerging out of critiques of classical theology. While, I do not intend to spell out that relationship, I want to argue that defending liberal political philosophy on the basis of neutrality or neutral reason becomes tenuous at best.

In the first half of the paper I try to explicate how one leading voice of modern liberalism argues for a liberal conception of multiculturalism in order to make liberal tolerance convincing against old regimes of religious authority (e.g Ottoman millet system). I anchor my analysis in the work of one of liberal multiculturalism's most outspoken advocates, Will Kymlicka—a Canadian political philosopher whose work belongs to the canon of liberal political philosophy today.[2] He has defended liberal tolerance against competing conceptions of tolerance in his seminal work, *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995). There, Kymlicka persuasively defends his view against Marxist, Communitarian and feminist social theorists. Central to his argument, as we will see, are conditions that play a formative role in constructing what he thinks is the proper liberal belief about the good life. Two conditions that he explicitly refers to are: 1) individual

[2] I am aware that not every liberal agrees with Kymlicka. However, I have yet to find liberal writers that challenge Kymlicka's commitment to the modern social imaginary.

endorsement and 2) rational revisability. Both play an important role in his argument for multiculturalism. They directly inform his conception of the Good life and in turn, the liberal Good life directly informs his ideas about multiculturalism.

The centrality of the aforementioned conditions for what Kymlicka believes to be the good life makes Charles Taylor's more recent book *A Secular Age* highly apt and relevant.[3] There Taylor argues that the rise of secularity is in fact precisely the arrival of new "conditions of belief." Hence, the secular and the arrival of these new conditions of belief are intimately entangled. I find Taylor's insights useful in understanding theorists like Kymlicka. Kymlicka, like Enlightenment thinkers before him, depends on a similar understanding of secularization. The shifts that Taylor speaks about in our conditions of belief help demonstrate the greater viability of liberal politics over pre-modern political theology.[4] This opens the question of whether or not such historical narratives are in fact accurate. However, this is not the concern of this paper and it is not central to my argument. I merely want to point out the fact that Kymlicka shares Taylor's particular view of history in order to begin his argument about liberal multiculturalism.

Although it is central to this thesis, the term 'conditions of belief' seems to be an oddly put phrase—at least not one that is common in political philosophy today. In everyday language

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[3] The phrase 'conditions of beliefs' designates the conditions upon which everyday beliefs are built. It comes from a deep historical consciousness. The paper will help make this clearer. But moderns assume that certain pervasive ways we see the world today was the way people always viewed the world. Interrogating 'conditions of belief' starts from the premise that the way moderns approach the world now-- things we take for granted, such as objects, space, time, and the self, is not always the way ordinary people viewed the world.

[4] Here I want to avoid a back-and-forth, argument-counter-argument format surrounding liberalism and communitarianism that comprises the bulk of today's abstract philosophical discourse surrounding multiculturalism—a kind of discourse that Kymlicka and his interlocutors find interesting. This paper, on the other hand, invites us to take a step back and examine meta-assumptions about the very possibility of liberal multiculturalism—assumptions that often get lost in the course of a rational debate. It starts this by contextualizing the modern discourse to the depths of its Western origins, and helps us examine the very presuppositions the debate stands/began on, the myths it inhabits and the histories in produces.

we might think of conditions of belief as a sort of *common sense*. In more philosophical language, we might define it as that pre-reflective human experience which forms the shared imaginary through which propositional beliefs make sense. In exploring this space we try to account for the sort of raw material that makes up our shared beliefs. For Taylor, it is not so simple as sense data, but rather the broader basis on which we create a social imaginary—how we see and understand sense-data themselves. Or we can say that it is the mental space which embodies shared assumptions, linguistic limits, and beliefs that help bind a society together. Taylor argues that the arrival of new conditions of belief in modern society make some forms of thought possible but others unthinkable.

Accordingly, Taylor holds that, under modern conditions of belief, belief in God is no longer regarded as something axiomatic, or socially obligatory—but rather a choice one enjoys. However, this social condition is something particularly new to our modern context. During the medieval period, Taylor claims, belief in God was anything but optional. God was part of everyday experience. Not believing in Him would have been equivalent to questioning one's *common sense*— something painfully obvious to ordinary people[5]. The rise of modern secularity opens the possibility of experiencing fullness in one's life without believing in God. This new experience was made possible by new conditions of belief. It marked the first time that conditions of beliefs were adjusted in such a way that believing in God was regarded as a choice one makes for oneself.[6] These new conditions make other priorities and possibilities axiomatic and socially obligatory.

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[5] I do not want to reduce the concept to mere common sense but for the moment I am using the word to help to clarify the point

[6] If it helps, try to think of an analogous society in which people were not assigned mothers but rather decided for themselves whether or not to believe in their own biological mother.

Changes in conditions of belief eventually laid the foundations for secular life more generally. This secularity includes recent calls for multicultural inclusion. Kymlicka's liberal multiculturalism preserves secular-liberal foundations, via historical narrative, on the level of conditions and, through the development of plurality and multiculturalism, reproduces a particularly secular social imaginary.[7]

A close reading into historical narratives, like the one presented by Taylor, is vital to political philosophy today. It pushes us to think beyond easy areas that at once seemed 'unobjectionable' (Kymlicka LCC, 11-12). This is because it is too easy to forget that at one time what seemed unobjectionable is now objectionable and vice versa. This sensitivity is especially important when the space of the unobjectionable, secular-liberal or not, plays a primary role in formulating political beliefs about the good life.

It should be clear by now that I am concerned that liberal multiculturalism, the dominant political theory of Western democracies, relies on certain implicit commitments *at the level of conditions of belief* and consequently is forced to regulate and sustain those conditions of belief against other human experiences. There are many ways to explain why this commitment has become so intimately important to liberal theory. I think it has in part to do with liberal political philosophy's historical tie to the rise of epistemological critiques of Christian religion—a particular European experience that has somehow become global. The portrayal of the pious as exceptionally susceptible to passion and unreason helped sell Enlightenment ideas of tolerance, freedom, equality and nationalism. But these portrayals were the exception in history. For most of human history, theologically informed politics, or what I refer to as "political theology", was

[7] Much like first-world feminism, a term developed to represent calls for social justice that embody western bias towards third-world feminists (e.g the only way to be a feminist is to be a white, middle-class, western feminist), the argument here is that liberal multiculturalism argues that the only way to be inclusive is to be secular.

considered perfectly reasonable. Political theology relied on old conditions of belief, namely a world in which God was axiomatic and belief in Him was socially obligatory. However, when conditions of belief were revolutionized during the birth of modernity, old political theologies were seen as unsustainable political solutions.

The idea that political theology was actually abandoned is a strong part of the literature. Not only liberals but also critics of liberalism share that position. For instance, most philosophers are aware of Carl Schmitt's work on political theology. There Schmitt critiqued modern liberal democracies. He argued that in an attempt to remove its theological foundations, liberal political thought is unable to deal with crises in democratic governance. In certain exceptional cases the law requires a forced suspension in order to remain sovereign. For Schmitt a natural conception of sovereignty that is grounded in the nation or the people is unable to realistically accomplish the act of a true sovereign or arbiter. He argued that modern liberal thought lost its pragmatic use when it no longer relied on a classical theological conception of sovereignty. The project, on Schmitt's view, is for political theory to realign modern governance with its theological foundations. While Schmitt's work in political theology has been very influential in raising awareness and opening a new debate on political theology, it shares a fundamental theoretical flaw. It assumes that liberal political thought actually broke from its theological foundations. Here I try to contest this Schmittian bias that pervades much of the literature on political theory both in liberal and theological circles.

In a world where liberalism more and more encounters radical diversity (including incommensurable worldviews)[8], a critical reexamination of liberal promises is, I think, timely. This isn't an easy task. This thesis asks the modern reader to ponder worlds outside of the world

[8] There is a lot of debate whether or not worldviews can be incommensurable. I assume that it is possible to have incommensurable world views, or what I call radical diversity. See work by Ruth Chang.

he finds himself inhabiting. And through considering other historical narratives it asks critical questions about our most basic assumptions. What happens to liberal multiculturalism when its theological assumptions are made explicit? Should we continue to hold those assumptions even though they make it difficult to accommodate different historical narratives? Can we imagine liberal multiculturalism without these historically contingent conditions of belief?

It is important to be clear that my agenda for this thesis is not to offer a polemic against liberal political philosophy in favor of religion. This is precisely because this kind of polemic relies on the very categories I want to question. Also, many modern people, religious or not, and dogmas, religious or not, also share modern conditions of belief. To make an easy dichotomy would blur the fact that theology, religion, believers are not a monolithic whole. My concern is primarily political. I would like to think about the possibility of creating a space for accommodating a new *imaginative politics*. I use the word 'imaginative' because, by interrogating conditions of belief, we are actually examining the limits of our own social imaginary. I am trying to explore what is rendered impossible or unimaginable by the present order. The question for multiculturalism shifts to whether or not liberalism can *accommodate* alternative kinds of political theories—especially ones that *imagine* exactly the kind of non-secular metaphysics excluded from a liberal social imaginary. Again this does not simply mean theocracies. Many modern theocracies share much in common with Western democratic states through the structure of the modern state. By focusing our critical lens on the boundaries of liberal permissibility and impermissibility, by accounting for the ways in which liberal multiculturalism regulates an alternative religious imagination, we can see how liberal orthodoxy is articulated and sustained. Is this orthodoxy—fashioned and projected from a particular

historical location—able to accommodate a world where we continue to see the empowerment of multiple social imaginaries and their corresponding imaginative politics?

In what follows, I first present Kymlicka's argument for tolerance. After that, I trace Taylor's account of how new conditions of belief marked the rise of secularity and employ Taylor's account to expose the theological assumptions on which Kymlicka's view rests. I then consider some responses to my argument against Kymlicka and close the paper with questions about the implications of such insights on liberal political philosophy more generally.

2. WILL KYMLICKA AND LIBERAL MULTICULTURALISM

Classical liberals have long argued that strong communitarianism can lead to group-hegemony over individual autonomy. Thus, liberals are often critical of arguments based on culture and tradition. Kymlicka disagrees with this xenophobic attitude and argues that there is enough room within modern liberalism to warrant a specifically liberal conception of cultural tolerance. He argues:

1) Societal cultures give life-choices meaning.
2) The abilities of an individual to (a) endorse and (b) revise *meaningful* life-choices are unobjectionable conditions for a good life.
3) Liberals should promote all conditions that allow individuals to pursue a good life.

Therefore,

4) Liberals should promote societal cultures.

In the way I have laid out this argument, (3) seems painfully obvious. (1) requires some explaining. But eventually I want to focus on (2). While (2) is coherent, I will show that it is a deeply controversial claim. I will begin by explaining (1) and then reserve the rest of this section to comment on the controversial nature of the second premise.

<u>(1) Societal cultures gives life-choices meaning</u>

Kymlicka finds classical liberal fears about empowering cultures outdated and problematic. It is outdated because diverse cultures are here to stay. They are a part of almost every modern society. Besides being outdates, it is problematic because individuals can make meaningful life-choices only when cultures provide meaning and context to those life-choices. If liberals are wedded to the freedom of choice, then they must give some thought to culture as well. He argues that:

> Cultures are valuable, not in and of themselves, but because it is only through having access to a societal culture that people have access to a range of meaningful choices. (Kymlicka 83)

> For meaningful individual choice to be possible, individuals need not only access to information, the capacity to reflectively evaluate it, and freedom of expression and association. They also need access to a societal culture. Group-differentiated measures that secure and promote this access may therefore, have a legitimate role to play in a liberal theory of justice…people's capacity to make meaningful choices depends on access to a cultural structure. (Kymlicka 84)

These two quotes show the way in which Kymlicka imagines the relationship between culture and individual choice. As we know, liberals champion individual choice because choice is essential to the central liberal commitment to individual freedom. But it is not enough to repeat the empty rhetoric of choice in terms of freedom of expression and association. In order for choices to be real, they must first be meaningful. How else would one distinguish between a pseudo-choice and substantively real choice? Leading anthropologists and liberal social theorists have demonstrated time and again that a shared vocabulary, cultural narrative, bonds of language, etc. assign meaning/content to particular norms and practices. Kymlicka thinks that group-differentiated rights can help to protect cultural meanings and thereby protecting cultures. State policies regarding national language, education policies, religious institutions, and land rights all are practical legal/political issues that hover around empowering a culture's ability to decide for itself what meaning it should or should not assign to individual choice.

An easy way of understanding this point is to consider a specific case. Consider a traditionally raised Hindu woman living in a liberal society like the United States. Assume, as liberals say, she desires to stand back and evaluate her life-choices. In this instance, one of the choices she might consider is her commitment to a traditional Hindu ritual called *karva chauth*. In this ritual she is told that she should keep a day-long fast for the sake of her husband's health

and happiness. At the end of her fast, she should dress in her finest clothes and jewelry and present herself to her husband. Upon praying for her husband, her husband is instructed to give the day's first drink and feed her, her first bite. This ritual is common among women in North India and other parts of the subcontinent.

What I understand Kymlicka saying about this ritual is that for it to mean anything at all, it must be embedded in a particular culture, through which it finds expression. What does the fasting mean? What does the husband's offering mean? Why wear jewelry? Etc. If our traditional Hindu woman wants to re-evaluate whether this ritual is something she wants to participate in, she must first understand its meaning, part and whole. That meaning is available to her only through North Indian Hindu culture because that culture and only it assigns proper meaning and importance to each concept deployed during the ritual. In order for her life-choice, reject or accept, to be meaningful, she must access the meanings of what it is she is accepting and rejecting.

Why more than one culture?

Suppose Kymlicka is right about the ways in which culture assigns meaning and content to particular norms and practices. We may concede that one culture is enough to provide this function. Why *multi*culturalism? Why should there be laws and official measures tailored to protect minority cultures within a liberal society? A single societal culture, one might argue, should be enough to provide a host of meaningful life-choices. Immigrants, national minorities can live a full-life by abandoning their own culture and melting into the dominant majority culture. On this view, individuals are encouraged to change cultures, rather than empowering other cultures. And the claim that individuals are unable to change cultures is seen as affirming

the false idea that *culture is self-identity*—an idea that limits individuality and allows only that which is in line with one's communitarian obligations/duties. Culture as self-identity is troubling to anyone who values individual choice. On this view, for someone who truly values freedom, cultural commitments function like any other personal commitments. Ordinary personal commitments do not become a matter of self-identity. For example, consider the commitments imparted through employment. There, individuals take on specific roles and obligations. However, those commitments are seen as negotiable. And if the obligations are unbearable people switch from one job to another. For classical liberals, cultural commitments should be accepted and rejected with similar ease.

Kymlicka argues against this trivial view of culture. This view, shared by many classical liberals, does not do justice to the role culture plays in the lives of most human beings. The view rests on an inaccurate, maybe even insensitive, equivocation between cultural commitments and ordinary personal commitments. While it is a kind of personal commitment, a more accurate analogy for Kymlicka would understand the processes of cultural-loss as 'falling into poverty'. By this analogy, the very quality of a person's life is reduced when they lose their culture. Loss of culture, like the loss of wealth, limits life choices. It is obvious that living in extreme poverty does not promote individual freedom and, by analogy, losing one's culture reduces the amount of meaningful choices needed in order to live a full life.

Kymlicka agrees with the classical liberal that an appropriate "liberal view insists that people can stand back and asses moral values and traditional ways of life." (Kymlicka 92) Moreover, people "should be given not only a legal right to do so, but also the social conditions which enhance this capacity." (Kymlicka 92) Kymlicka admits that the classical liberal is right to recognize that people should have the freedom of choice, but focusing solely in terms of

choice distorts a profound aspect of what it means to have a choice—namely, it forgets that choices, even the most eclectic kind, are only possible through a number of flourishing cultures. Practices and conventions, as encountered by individuals in the world, are full of meaning through the situated and contextualized value assigned to them by social cultures. Choices do not exist in a vacuum, nor do their meanings. In order to understand these choices (which must be prized by liberal morality), the presence of multiple flourishing societal cultures is necessary.

This argument is very sophisticated and relies on certain understandings of semantics and how words and concepts get their meanings. One could spend time analyzing whether or not Kymlicka has the right picture. While these are interesting trajectories, I will leave the analysis of this premise to philosophers of language and anthropologists. For now, let's assume Kymlicka has got the right picture. I want to push on and analyze Kymlicka's second premise because, in regard to the purposes of this paper, that premise is more relevant.

(2) The abilities of individuals to (a) endorse and (b) revise *meaningful* life-choices are unobjectionable conditions a good life

So far we have a clear idea that there is a strong relationship between individual choice and culture. According to Kymlicka, culture provides the meaningful-ness in meaningful life-choices. Now let me turn my attention to the second premise. Here, Kymlicka claims that individuals lead a good life only by being able to endorse certain life-choices and revise them if they turn out to be unsatisfactory. He does not believe there is one good life, but rather multiple conceptions of what one might think is the good life. He writes:

> …we have two preconditions for leading a good life. The first is that we lead our life from the inside, in accordance with our beliefs about what gives value to life… The second precondition is that we be free to question

> those beliefs, to examine them in light of whatever information, examples, and arguments our culture can provide. Individuals must therefore have the conditions necessary to acquire an awareness of different views about the good life, and an ability to examine these views intelligently. (Kymlicka 81)

Here Kymlicka is committing himself to two conditions for a good life: 1) the endorsement constraint and 2) rational revision. Kymlicka understands a good life as a life examined. It is lived "from the inside" but also with the ability to revise one's commitments by standing back and evaluating which of them are worth pursuing and which are not. Let me explain both of these in detail and then explain what I find controversial about these conditions.

Endorsement

Kymlicka uses the phrase: 'living life from the inside'. What does he mean by this? Kymlicka cites Ronald Dworkin as the source of this idea. Dworkin holds that nothing contributes to the value of life without individual endorsement. Kymlicka writes, "Dworkin calls this the 'endorsement constraint', and argues that 'no component contributes to the value of a life without endorsement…it is implausible to think that someone can lead a better life against the grain of his profound ethical convictions than at peace with them.'" (Kymlicka 81) In much of his writings Dworkin has argued that norms and practices become valuable only if a person identifies with them, embraces them, and is not deeply alienated by them. This means that norms and practices enforced from the outside will not add value to one's life. I think here we have run into some form of individual autonomy central to this view of liberalism.

Dworkin provides an example of a homosexual. He writes, "Suppose someone who would lead a homosexual life does not, out of fear of punishment. If he never endorses the life he leads as superior to the life he would otherwise have led, then his life has not been improved,

even in the critical sense, by the paternalistic constraints he hates." (Dworkin 218) Here endorsement is contrasted with paternalism. A person leading a non-homosexual life, perhaps a heterosexual life, does not feel that his life is improved because his heterosexuality does not, in the end, add value to his life. His life would be more valuable if he were able to comfortably be a homosexual. This is because he endorses homosexuality rather than heterosexuality. The role endorsement plays in terms of value is an issue I want to return to later when I analyze this constraint in more depth. For the moment allow me to finish laying out the rest of Kymlicka's argument and then I will consider both in terms of 'exclusive humanism'.

Revision

The second condition of what is the good life is being able to question beliefs. Simply endorsing a belief does not make it permanent. Individuals should be able to revisit their decisions and revise them. Kymlicka writes, "Since we can be wrong about the worth or value of what we are currently doing, and since no one wants to lead a life based on false beliefs about its worth, it is of fundamental importance that we be able rationally to assess our conceptions of the good in the light of new information or experiences, and to revise them if they are not worthy of our continued allegiance." (Kymlicka 81) For example, consider a person who decides not to get married. For a while he enjoys being single. However, over time he may not find being single as glamorous as he once thought. Bachelorhood did not add the value to his life as he intended. According to Kymlicka he should be allowed to reassess his decision. He could stand back and revise his decision and chose an entirely different course of action.

The Controversy:

I started this section by stating that arguments for liberal multiculturalism have hidden commitments on the level of conditions of beliefs. What I want to say more directly is that the beliefs Kymlicka is advocating can only take hold in individuals if they inhabit certain conditions. Here I am not making an equivocation on the word 'condition'. I am arguing that what Kymlicka is outlining when he puts conditions on the good are exactly the kind of conditions Taylor is concerned with when he says 'exclusive humanism' marks the existence of new conditions of belief in modern society. Much has been written on how Kymlicka's conditions secure at its foundation an autonomous human being. But I don't think talk of autonomy addresses the critique against liberal claims of theological neutrality. Here I want to examine how specifically endorsement and revision embody secular conditions of belief prior to autonomy. In order to demonstrate the last point, one needs to show the secular nature of Kymlicka's conditions.

Exclusive humanism, according to Taylor, is a way of looking at the world that conceives of agency within an immanent frame—separate from transcendence. One way to understand this framework and see its limits is to imagine an entirely different conceptual space—one that does not conceive of the good life in terms of exclusive humanism. Borrowing Weber's term, Taylor refers to this view as enchantment. This was the kind of world inhabited by our pre-modern ancestors. Such a worldview perceives the world enchanted with forces and objects that possess the capacity to step outside of ordinary homogenous time. These objects and forces may also possess agency even though they are not human 'minds'. Because these extraordinary forces posses agency, they also affect humans with or without their consent. This world is different from a world where only human minds posses agency. Taylor cites the example of holy relics.

Relics are objects, but unlike inert dead matter they exude a certain force upon humans. By being near them or invoking their powers one is subject to forces of good or evil. This is because it is believed that a relic is able to somehow reach into history and unleash powerful forces upon humans. It is often described as an ability to access varying levels of reality at once. This makes the relic by its very existence able to impact and affect those living in simple ordinary time. These abilities are not restricted to holy relics but also persons, human and non-human who like the relics transcend ordinary time and access varying levels of reality.

In such an enchanted cosmos, the good life exists outside of 'minds', and is fixed to a perceivable natural order. By using our imagination in this way we do not reject endorsement or rational revisabilty but rather we examine the axiomatic nature of these claims. A framework that is not exclusively humanistic, is one that constitutes the perception of the world as a place where objects, persons, and forces can harm or aid individuals living in ordinary time. For Dworkin and Kymlicka value in life is added solely through authentic individual endorsement. But in an enchanted/non-humanistic universe, value does not rest so much on personal endorsement, but the practical skill of navigating the world under constant threat of uncontrollable forces. This tricky path might be mastered through endorsement but at the same time it may also require samurai-like submissive training in order to prepare oneself against the influence of random evil. In such a framework the place and priority of one's own endorsement would seem less important than, say, the endorsement of certain epistocrats who regularly step outside of ordinary homogenous time and know with certainty how to evade evil.

This reflection on a thoroughly transcendent and enchanted universe, outside of exclusive humanism, shows that liberal tolerance, defended as theologically neutral, in fact assumes conditions of belief that place primary importance on ordinary exclusive humanism. This is

because it takes for granted that certain historical shifts in our social imaginary closed off the kind of transcendent, enchanted experience I mentioned above. Plainly speaking, an exclusively humanistic approach sees it as commonsense or axiomatic that people do not view the world as an enchanted cosmos. Without reading history in terms of a progressive disenchantment, like Taylor, this form of tolerance stands on shaky grounds. Others, who perceive the world as enchanted, embody alternative conditions of beliefs and therefore they may find the axiomatic nature of individual endorsement secondary to what is the good life.

In order to see how this works we must examine in greater detail what exclusive humanism is and how we got to it. For that, I now turn to Taylor's historical narrative.

3. TOWARD UNDERSTANDING TAYLOR'S EXCLUSIVE HUMANISM

In this section I try to untangle Charles Taylor's lengthy and complex narrative about secularity as it is detailed in his book *A Secular Age*. First, I will explain what Taylor is writing against. Then I will lay out his general argument, followed by a detailed look at one of his more controversial claims. This is a claim Kymlicka implicitly shares. I will do this by making ideas that reflect conditions of belief and refer to nature, time and the human central to the explication.[9] This explication, I hope, will be more useful when later in the paper I consider how secularity interacts with liberal political philosophy more generally.

Not a Subtraction Story

At the beginning of his book, Taylor makes it clear that his story is not the typical 'subtraction story' of secularization. A 'subtraction story' posits history as moving toward a predestined disenchantment—the world was once filled with supernatural forces and agents and now it is not. This way of theorizing about secularism was popular among sociologists at the turn of the century and continues to be popular among many intellectuals today. Those who advocate this view perceive disenchantment in a constricted, evolutionary caste. Classical theorists, such as Weber, argued that as humans 'progressed'—technologically and scientifically—they no longer derived meaning from supernatural, transcendental, or mystical explanations. Modern man, on this view, began to interiorize the proposition that *enchantment arrests human progress*. People distanced themselves from traditional explanations about reality—they wanted to free themselves from '[religion's] perverse and illusionary condemnations'. Thus, humanity would eventually liberate itself from superstition. Along with

[9] Taylor himself takes a chronological approach in his book. I favor keeping concepts at the forefront of the discussion because it makes it easier for analysis.

liberation, disenchantment would also allow the 'value of ordinary human desire' to shine through as it always should with progress and modernization (Taylor 253).

While Taylor largely agrees with classical social theorists that a kind of disenchantment has taken place in Western society, he has problems with the linear nature of the story. For one, it doesn't answer the question: why did secularity emerge from Enlightenment Europe and nowhere else? Linear stories often assume too much, too quickly; and so, they are worth reexamining. Taylor claims that the real story about secularity is in fact much more interesting. It is, he writes, more of a "zig-zag account…full of unintended consequences" (Taylor 95). The arrival of what he calls the "secular age" marks the arrival of a *particular* kind of modernity—one that inhabits new and novel conditions of belief.

What I think distinguishes Taylor from the classical theorists is his emphasis on seeing the rise of secularity as woven out of an infinite number of historical possibilities. It's not fixed to a pre-written script of decline. For Taylor, specific, identifiable intellectual shifts among ordinary people created 'ratchet effects' that spurred European society in a particular direction. Secularity was the product of how ordinary people came to see the world in unpredictable ways. Imbedded in this story is the idea that the (re)construction of ordinary people's social imaginary makes certain kinds of belief possible (read: disenchantment/secularity) while making other kinds of belief very difficult, if not impossible (read: enchantment/naive belief). Before the secular age, the conditions of belief were such that naive religious faith was readily understood. God was everywhere. It was part of our common sense and made doubting God unreasonable, perhaps even impossible. But the question here isn't merely about the theistic God of Abraham. Ordinary people inhabited a thoroughly enchanted world. "The enchanted world in this sense is the world of spirits, demons, and moral forces...the Christian God was the ultimate guarantee that

good would triumph or at least hold the plentiful forces of darkness at bay." (Taylor 26) However, after the arrival of the secular age, modern conditions of belief made it possible to see belief in God as merely one choice amongst others.

In the end, as many critics have pointed out, Taylor takes the scenic route but eventually endorses a kind of subtraction story. Taylor's main contribution to the growing literature on secularization is his philosophical focus on 'conditions of belief' rather than less parsimonious explanations such as the decline of religious institutions or personal piety. Talking about conditions of belief changes the way we approach secularity itself. For instance, it can no longer be a single discussion about the removal of God-talk from politics. Secularity becomes, as Taylor writes, a state of existence "in which the eclipse of all goals beyond human flourishing becomes conceivable" (Taylor 19-20). This way of thinking about secularity thwarts attempts by reactionaries who try to overturn secularity by either bolstering religious power or merely increasing personal piety. Merely creating, for example, a theocratic state or becoming a better Christian doesn't resolve the predicament. To live in a secular age means to thoroughly inhabit this new state of existence—to share with others the modern social imaginary. By explaining secularity in terms of conditions, theocracies and pious persons can remain thoroughly secular as long as they share in what Taylor terms the 'modern malaise'. In a secular age ordinary people are quickened into pursuing a contented but flat life, as one commentator writes—"I embrace my ordinary work, my ordinary marriage, and my ordinary hobbies. I fail to aspire to some kind of greatness driven by my deepest passions and instincts. Even my sexuality and aggression are policed by bourgeois religion, society, and state. In the end I focus on making money and living decently in society." (McCurry, 625) Taylor asserts that this pessimistic description of modern

life applies to the current condition of large populations across the world pursing ordinary human flourishing and nothing more.

The Narrative Outline

While Taylor manages to turn the discussion surrounding secularity toward exploring the more philosophical notion of conditions of belief, his narrative reads more like a novel than a tightly argued philosophical treatise. His reflections follow a plot hinged together along a loose chronological order. At times he playfully jumps back and forth in time to highlight dramatic turns in his story. Beginning with the enchanted cosmos of the ancients, he eventually works his way from Medieval Europe through the Protestant Reformation until he concludes the book in the present Secular Age.[10]

It is well known that the intellectual movement in Europe known as the Enlightenment was central in fashioning our modern conditions of beliefs and the making of modernity. This trope is also present in Taylor's narrative. Throughout the 874 page work Taylor talks intermittently about developments that took place during the Enlightenment. Yet this is not the full story. It becomes clear that for him other intellectual movements in and around the Enlightenment, such as the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution are just as important. However, I will primarily concentrate my attention on the role of the Enlightenment in Taylor's story. This choice is not only because of the important role the Enlightenment plays in Taylor's

[10] Why he chooses to begin his archeology at the Protestant Reformation may be worth some further investigation. He opens the first chapter by asking: "why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500, in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?"(25) It is a provocative question precisely because the date that he chooses to mark the era of secured faith is anything but arbitrary. The year 1500 was only 17 years before Martin Luther posted his *Ninty-Five Theses* on Wittenberg's Church. By this Taylor implies from the start that the Protestant Reformation marks a central point in the story toward secularity.)

narrative but also because of the relationship this period in Western history has with the second concern of this paper: modern liberalism.[11]

Taylor's Overall Argument

For the purposes of this thesis, what I am really asking of Taylor is: what are the processes by which the Enlightenment radically altered ordinary people's conditions of belief? Taylor's answer reads something like this: Intellectual shifts during the Enlightenment were catalysts that pushed forward certain proto-modern impulses that had burst onto the scene during the Protestant Reformation. These changes can be tracked in the way ordinary people began to express their understanding of themselves, the cosmos, and time. By the end of the Enlightenment, the social imaginary of Western Europe had been forever changed. Old conditions of beliefs were fractured and the reality of 'modern exclusive humanism' became a live option. In this way, human fullness and contentment could be secured without God or religion but rather within the confines of ordinary human flourishing. Over the centuries that followed, modern exclusive humanism rejected the possibility of a transcendental reality and put in its place humans inhabiting what Taylor calls an 'immanent frame'.

The Shifts:

The central claim in Taylor's argument is that certain shifts during the Enlightenment changed ordinary conditions of belief. Let us look closer at this claim. There are three central ways Taylor thinks the Enlightenment effects these shifts.

[11] Taylor spends a good bit of time talking about the "Work of Reform" in which Protestant ideas about the Reformation weave in and out from the discussion. It is not that he argues that the Enlightenment forms the only intellectual movement that fashions modern conditions of beliefs. However, it is just as important to his larger point as is his discussions on the Reformation.

First, the Enlightenment altered the way we see time. Time became homogeneous, empty and linear. Second, the Enlightenment changed the way humans perceived the cosmos, especially nature. The natural world became autonomous and important for its own sake. Later it was de-sacralized and reduced to a mathematical/mechanical order based on natural observation. Lastly and most importantly, the Enlightenment radically changed the way humans saw themselves. They began seeing themselves as "buffered", or having immunity from random evil forces. They thought of themselves as individuals with uniform capacities, self-disciplined, and as primarily rational.

Taken as a package, Taylor claims that these shifts changed what he terms our "social imaginary". In the sections that follow, I will first outline what is 'the social imaginary', then I will look in detail at each one of these shifts that radically changed the way moderns look upon the world in contrast to their pre-modern ancestors.

What is a 'social imaginary', exactly?

Let me pause here and spend some time explaining what I understand by Taylor's use of the term "social imaginary". A revealing passage about the social imaginary reads: "[A social imaginary is] the ways in which [large groups of people] imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations." (Taylor 171) The social imaginary, on this account, is a kind of predetermined, theory-laden interpretation jointly held by a large group of people—it is something like a social worldview. To say it differently, it makes common, rudimentary social practices possible with a

wide sense of accepted legitimacy. Thus, the social imaginary comprises some set of conditions of belief that a group of people share. Consider the following two examples.

First Taylor asks us to consider the mundane social practice of choosing governments through general elections. Generally speaking, citizens living in liberal democracies are very familiar with the practice of voting. But how exactly do they achieve it? At first glance it seems pretty simple. We agree that it begins with each citizen casting his/her ballot. Then a designated subgroup of people count all the votes and announce the larger group's decision. And based upon this decision a new government is eventually formed. The point here isn't that the common practice of voting requires some amount of coordination and practical know-how. The question that interests Taylor is: how is all this quiet coordination and practical know-how possible? He suspects that beneath the practical knowledge of voting there exists a complex net of consensuses on certain boundaries, limits and possibilities surrounding the practice. For instance we take it for granted that "certain kinds of influence, buying votes, threats, and the like" (Taylor 172) render the process illegitimate. Conversely, we also immediately recognize what constitutes an ideal election. It usually amounts to "an election in which each citizen exercised to the maximum his/her judgment autonomously, in which everyone was heard, etc." (Taylor 172)

These observations lead Taylor to claim that practices rest on a collective social imagination. The social imaginary makes all this possible. It immediately grasps a fundamental state of affairs in the world. For example, we can note that the process of voting assumes a certain kind of individual. The individuals involved know how to represent themselves as agents who exercise an amount of autonomous reasoning—they are confident in themselves and their ability to choose for themselves what they want. Moreover, they are primarily individuals, not

collective units and are able to stand outside of other forces operating on them; they are, self-legislating. These deeper assumptions about the individual are operating on a psychological level underneath beliefs. These are what Taylor sees as conditions of belief. We take them for granted in order to get on with ordinary social tasks. Consider another example:

> Let's say we organize a demonstration. This means that this act is already in our repertory. We know how to assemble, pick up banners, and march. We know that this is meant to remain within certain bounds, both spatially (don't invade certain spaces), and in the way it impinges on others (this side of the threshold of aggressivity—no violence). We understand the ritual.

He adds:

> The background understanding which makes this act possible for us is complex, but part of what makes sense of it is some picture of ourselves as speaking to others, to which we are related in a certain way—say, compatriots, or the human race. There is a speech act here, addresser and addressees, and some understanding of how they can stand in this relation to each other. There are public spaces; we are already in some kind of conversation with each other…The action is forceful; it is meant to impress, perhaps even to threaten certain consequences if our message is not heard. But it is also meant to persuade; it remains this side of violence. It figures the addressee as one who can be, must be, reasoned with.
>
> We can gesture quickly at all this by saying that this kind of demonstration has its normal place in a stable, ordered, democratic society. (Taylor 173-174)

As the reader can note, conditions function deep below the surface of belief and form the common sense experience of reality. Nevertheless, they are assumptions upon which the practice of voting or demonstrating *necessarily rides*. If we sit back and try to map out what all is required or assumed in order to make such ordinary tasks possible, the list could be indefinite and unstructured. This is why the social imaginary and the set of conditions it designates can be extremely vague. Yet, somehow we 'get it'. In fact, we live in it and live with it even though it

is so difficult to articulate. Not only is it tucked away in our mind, but we reproduce and consume it in the forms of images, stories, myths, legends, and movies. Further, when we read novels or watch movies that don't match our shared imaginary we immediately recognize them as a misfit. We categorize them as works of fiction or fantasy.

A group of people may have what Taylor calls a 'repertory of collective action'. And these collective practices, such as voting or demonstrating, interact with their respective social imaginaries. Sometimes practices can change, reform, and even die. For instance we may stop voting or even stop choosing our governments all together. But that does not mean that the social imaginary underneath it has died, nor that the social imaginaries are permanently fixed. Just as practices can change, so can imaginaries. For Taylor, this happens in a number of ways. One way this happens is when humans start to theorize about themselves. He writes, "Now it very often happens that what starts off as theories held by a few people may come to infiltrate the social imaginary, first of elites perhaps, and then of the whole society." (Taylor 172) Taylor explains:

> Well for the most part, people take up, improvise, or are inducted into new practices. These are made sense of by the new outlook, the one first articulated in the theory; this outlook is the context that gives sense to these practices. And hence the new understanding comes to be accessible to the participants in a way it wasn't before. It begins to define the contours of their world, and can eventually come to count as the taken-for-granted shape of things, too obvious to mention. (Taylor 175-176)

Social imaginaries can be changed from above and below, so that abstract theory isn't the only way the social imaginary is challenged. Sometimes social practices can eventually change the social imaginary. Both practice and theory interact in an ongoing process. Newly inaugurated

practices can adjust theory and theory can inaugurate new practices, both altering the social imaginary.

Time: homogeneous, empty, and linear

The way we conceive time is taken for granted amongst modern theorists today. However, Taylor argues that this intuitive consensus was not always as such. He tries to trace how time consciousness has changed overtime. Time used to be seen as heterogeneous. There were different kinds of time existing simultaneously, and human beings possessed the capacity to experience different levels and speeds of time. Taylor writes. "Our forbearers lived in a world of multiple times, hierarchically related. The social orders of hierarchical complementarity in which they lived only made sense within this multi-layered time. A doctrine like that of the King's Two Bodies becomes bizarre nonsense in the uniform, secular time of modernity." (Taylor 712) He adds, "A kingdom could only be conceived as grounded in something higher than mere human action in secular time." (Taylor 25) However, at some point this fanciful ability to experience varying times became impossible. Time that was once 'kairotic' and heterogeneous, became homogenous and secular.

Modern time-consciousness has come to mean solely secular time-consciousness. By this Taylor means that particular intellectual shifts in the past 500 years have theorized the world in such a way that makes the complexity of time-experience impossible. He writes, ""Secular" time is what to us is ordinary time, indeed, to *us* it's just time, period. One thing happens after another, and when something is past, it's past. Time placings are consistently transitive. If A is before B and B before C, then A is before C. The same goes if we quantify these relations: if A is long before B, and B long before C, then A is very long before C." (Taylor 55) This new kind of

time evolved to become simplified and linear. For our pre-Enlightenment ancestors it was common to believe that one could occupy different times in different places at varying speeds. This made time a complex phenomenon allowing people to step outside of their ordinary experience.

Higher times re-ordered ordinary time and created what Taylor calls "warps" and inconsistencies. Ordinary time, or secular time, was seen as imperfect because of its limited and ever changing nature. Higher time, on the other hand, interrupts and constructs moments where people can reach into perfect eternity. Thus, it allows humans to experience moments of perfection. It allowed ordinary people to inhabit the unchanging and eternal world of the Divine. Taylor cites Benedict Anderson's examples of the crucifixion of Christ or Abraham's sacrifice as important markers of higher time in medieval Christendom. Taylor writes, "Good Friday 1998 is closer in a way to the original day of the Crucifixion than to a mid-summer's day 1997. Once events are situated in relation to more than one kind of time, the issue of time-placing becomes quite transformed." (Taylor 55) "Our time understanding [becomes]…radically altered…", in premodern time-consciousness, a person could jump time. He could move from higher time to lower time. But also he could move from more ordered time to disordered time. Taylor gives the example of Carnival as a time for misrule and then contrasts that to the time soon after for the re-enactment of order. All this differs from the horizon of modern time reconstruction as linear, always ordered and thus consisting of "homogeneous, empty time". (Taylor 129)

The idea of higher time, as opposed to secular time, was known to the Greeks and was as common sense until its refashioning during the modern period. Greek philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and the later Stoics thought of higher time as circular and cyclical, like the heavenly bodies. This was commonly reasserted through Greek mythology, where everything

returns to an original point. This conception of time can also be found in some Hindu mythologies. Christian thinkers borrowed from these early Greek theories in order to develop a similar but different understanding of time. Taylor writes, "The Christian conception…evolves slowly, but its best formulation in Latin Christendom comes from Augustine. With him eternity is reconceived as gathered time….Augustine in his famous discussion in *Confessions XI* examines lived time…[I]t is the gathering together of past into present to project a future. The past, which "objectively" exists no more, is here in my present; it shapes this moment in which I turn to a future, which "objectively" is not yet, but which is here…" (Taylor 56) For Augustine and Christians of the early Enlightenment, God makes all time and therefore, all time stands before him in an instant. To these two kinds of time, one found in Greek writings and another in the later Christian development, Taylor adds a third kind of higher time found in the writings of Mircea Eliade. There he describes what has come to be known as the 'time of origins', 'illud tempus', or Great Time. This is the founding moment for many folk traditions, where the hero, god or sacred moment lays the order of things and through ritual and other cultural practices we can come closer to the moment of origins.

The departure from higher heterogeneous time to secular homogenous time is a topic discussed by many besides Taylor.[12] Theorists conclude that the ideas proposed by the New Science after the Scientific Revolution were central in fashioning our conception of ordinary time. One such detailed argument can be found in the works of the imminent historian of science, Alexandre Koyré. In his book *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, Koyré expounds a nuanced account of how Newtonian mechanics assaulted the common-sense understanding of time as relative and subjective to different placings. Newton revolutionized the

[12] Taylor cites in detail the work of Benedict Anderson but also there has been recent work by Judith Butler, William Connolly, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Walter Benjamin, Alexandre Koyré and other historians of science.

ordinary understanding of time as homogenous through what he called the absolute nature of time. Time's essential nature, according to Newton, was fixed and it made it possible to think of fixed laws that govern nature. However, in his own time, Newton's claims were seen as controversial. Many of his contemporaries understood the implications of what he was claiming but nevertheless, Newton's version of reality won out among Enlightenment thinkers and so did his revolutionary metaphysical implications. In volume one of his *Principia,* Newton wrote:

> It may be that there is no such thing as an equable motion whereby time may be accurately measured. All motion may be accelerated and retarded, but the flowing of absolute time is liable to no change. The duration or perseverance of the existence of things remains the same; whether the motions are swift or slow, or none at all: and therefore it ought to be distinguished from what are only sensible measures thereof. (Newton, 8)

Koyré comments on this passage that Newton was writing against the pre-modern Aristotelian model of the universe. In the Aristotelian physical frame time was linked to motion, meaning time experience could be relative and subjective. Quoting Newton again, Koyré points out: "Absolute, true and mathematical time, of itself and from its own nature, flows equably without regard to anything external." Koyré interprets this last sentence to mean: "that…[time] ….has its own nature…a rather equivocal and dangerous assertion…[T]ime is not something subjective…Time and duration are only two names for the same objective and absolute entity." Koyré again quotes the *Principia*: "…relative, apparent and common time, is…[a] measure of duration by the means of motion, which is commonly used instead of true time: such as an hour, a day, a month, a year." Newton's conception of time was popularized through his fame and scientific discoveries but, many wrote against this popular trend. Koyré cites Bishop Berkeley's defense of higher time (1710) against Newton's notions of absolute time as an example of a dissenting voice. Berkeley argued that by asserting time was eternal, uncreated, infinite,

qualitatively indivisible, and immutable, Newton made time God-like and therefore against any good Christian understanding of time.

Taylor's argument coincides with the theoretical observations made by Koyré. Homogenous, empty time is one way in which moderns have managed to close off transcendent experience.

Nature for its own sake and mechanization

The second shift Taylor identifies in the modern social imaginary comes in the way moderns began to observe and interpret the cosmos. He argues that after the Enlightenment, nature becomes autonomous and for the first time important for its own sake. This transition was instrumental in eclipsing the idea of the transcendent good, beyond human flourishing, leading to human exclusivism. Before this shift, nature was seen as a part of a larger normative cosmic order. The transition to the eventual mechanization of the world turned nature into an ordered object for human purposes.

> The great invention of the West was that of an immanent order in Nature, whose working could be systematically understood and explained on its own terms, leaving open the question whether this whole order had a deeper significance, and whether, if it did, we should infer a transcendent Creator beyond it. This notion of the 'immanent' involved denying—or at least isolating and problematizing—any form of interpenetration between the things of Nature, on one hand, and 'the supernatural' on the other, be this understood in terms of the one transcendent God, or of Gods or spirits, or magic forces, or whatever. (Taylor 15-16)

Taylor's narrative about the alteration of nature-space highlights the change away from natural phenomena as a magnificent design of the Divine presence. In the former view nature was God's voice in an interlocking, self-sustaining mechanical universe. In fact, the view of nature as God's design and creation was so deeply rooted that the very intellectual shifts in approaching nature as

a mechanized world had to be made from within the religious outlook. Broad-stroke theorists imagine that godless scientists rejected an enchanted nature. However, it was in fact theological arguments during the Reformation that actually began to lay the foundations of a disenchanted mathematical universe. Taylor writes, "The new interest in nature was not a step outside of a religious outlook, even partially; it was a mutation within this outlook. The straight path account of modern secularity can't be sustained...This move had a quite different meaning at the time, and in other circumstances might never have come to have the meaning that it bears for unbelievers today." (Taylor 95)

One of the key ways in which Enlightenment thinkers changed the way we see the world is by rejecting the Aristotelian notion of final causation as mere speculation. Taylor writes:

> Living a godly life in this world is something very different from living in the ordered Aristotelian Cosmos of Aquinas, or the hierarchy of Pseudo-Dionysios. It is no longer a matter of admiring a normative order, in which God has revealed himself through signs and symbols. We rather have to inhabit it as agents of instrumental reason, working the system effectively in order to bring about God's purposes; because it is through these purposes, and not through signs, that God reveals himself in his world. These are not just two different stances, but two incompatible ones. We have to abandon the attempt to read the cosmos as the locus of signs, reject this as illusion, in order to adopt the instrumental stance effectively. Not just on a level of popular belief, as a world of spirits, do we have to disenchant the universe; we have also to bring about the analogous shift on the high cultural level of science, and trade in a universe of ordered signs, in which everything has a meaning, for a silent but beneficent machine. (Taylor 98)

In this lengthy quote, Taylor explains how God's purposes for nature, or we can say nature's final causes are removed from our world because they prevented us from dominating nature through instrumental reason. Teleological claims also escaped observational confirmation and therefore made hypotheses on final causation an unnecessary intrusion in a self-contained, closed universe. The idea that the cosmos is a machine became more and more important.

Kinetic motion, which was for Neoplatonists and scholastic scholars the work of God's intervention on earth, became the product of the object itself. The object moved and stopped simply due to force and inertia.

Another shift for Taylor from the pre-modern cosmos to the Enlightenment's cosmic imaginary concerns the way we view matter itself. Matter became dead and purposeless. It became the object of domination and manipulation. Taylor writes,

> In such a universe, nothing is demanded of us; we have no destiny which we are called on to achieve, on pain of damnation, or divine retribution, or some terminal discord with ourselves. Already the Epicureans had made this point in one form. To know that all comes from atoms and their swervings, that the Gods are utterly unconcerned with us, is to liberate us from fear of the beyond, and thus allow us to achieve *ataraxia*. Modern materialism takes up this legacy, but gives it the characteristically modern activist twist: in this purposeless universe, we decide what goals to pursue. Or else we find them in the depths, our depths, that is, something we can recognize as coming from deep within us. In either case, it is we who determine the order of human things… (Taylor 367)

Taylor is describing two interrelated processes that emerge out of the Enlightenment. One, he is first highlighting a shift in the way we see the cosmic order. In its Enlightenment form, the new cosmic imaginary sees nature as inert, impenetrable, and purposeless. The only way objects can move is through forces upon them by other objects. Because of this metaphysical change, matter becomes the object of human purpose for mutual benefit. This is the beginning of the idea that humans are the masters of nature.

These shifts during the Reformation, within the religious outlook, were taken for granted by thinkers of the early Enlightenment and further propagated among the masses. These shifts led to exclusive humanism. Taylor writes, "The same crucial features recur here as in the story of the ultimate effects of the Reformation: disenchantment, the active instrumental stance

towards the world, and the following of God's purposes, which means beneficence. And these are the key features of the new emergent exclusive humanism." (Taylor 98) [13]

The Buffered Self

While Taylor's shifts in the cosmos and time help describe the immanent frame, his major contribution to the metaphysics of secularism traces the way the human, as a subject, has transformed its own self-perception over time. For those who are familiar with Taylor, his focus on the self comes from his seminal work, *Sources of the Self*. There he documented the slow transformation of human identity from the Reformation to the modern period. He highlighted modern man's turn towards inwardness, instrumental rationality and hyper expressivism. In *A Secular Age*, Taylor builds on his previous work and elaborates how these fundamental changes in a theocentric self-conception contribute to disenchantment toward a strictly anthropocentric identity. He argues that there are three major ways in which the human changed in the modern period. In this section I will try to bring out these shifts by comparing them to their supposedly pre-modern characteristics.

1) Buffered Self v. Porous Self
2) Disengaged Instrumental Reason vs. Natural Holistic Reason
3) Uniform Capacity vs. Varying Capacity

The first major shift that marks the core of the modern identity is the slow erosion of the Porous Self. In the pre-modern world, man lived amongst a host of natural forces that could have

[13] Like the investigation of time, many theorists have also interrogated the mechanization of nature. One such example can be found in the work of one of George Sarton's famous students, S. H. Nasr. His work on the history of Western science, *Religion and the Order of Nature,* documents the ways in which developments in science and theology changed the way moderns view the world. Essential in this transformation are the contributions of Copernicus, Sir Francis Bacon and Descartes. See S. H. Nasr, Frithjof Capra, Alexandre Koyre, Edwin Burtt, Allen Dubes, Gary Hatfield, I. Bernard Cohen, Louis Dupre

involuntary effects on him. These included spirits, demons, angels, witches, saints, and even sacred relics or cursed locations. These entities wielded "magic" or some combination of natural forces that retained the capacity to penetrate the mind and body and cause evil or inspire good in lived reality. By the time we read Descartes, Taylor argues, a kind of mind-body problem grips modern man. However, in a traditional worldview, this kind of problem made no sense because the very existence of this problem relies on the modern notion of the Buffered Self which pre-moderns did not acknowledge. Taylor writes, "The process of disenchantment is the disappearance of this [enchanted] world: and the substitution of what we live today: a world in which the only locus of thoughts, feelings, spiritual èlan is what we call minds; the only minds in the cosmos are those of humans…and minds are bounded, so that these thoughts, feelings etc., are situated "within" them." (Taylor 29-30) What Taylor is describing here is the common sense understanding of the human held by ordinary modern people. The mind holds 'thoughts', which for Taylor means perceptions, beliefs or propositions but also responses, significance, importance, and the meaning of things. In the mind we sense or respond to external stimuli and reflect on those internally with inward experiences.

For a Porous, pre-modern Self, meanings are not restricted to the mind alone, there are minds outside of human minds. For instance, Satan and other demons are prime examples of minds outside of human minds. But besides beings, inanimate objects such as forests, the wilderness, rocks, mountains, etc can also be threatening or in Taylor's words, a source of real meaning. In this worldview, spirits and relics, alike, had the capacity to influence, penetrate, infiltrate into the human mind and evoke evil, good, happiness, contentment, melancholy, etc. An example of this is the relics of Saints that were used as cures for the sick. All these extra-human agents were seen as loci of power. Taylor writes,

> Indeed, we can say that in this world, there is a whole gamut of forces, ranging from (to take the evil side for a moment) super-agents life Satan himself, forever plotting to encompass our damnation, down to minor demons, like spirits of the wood, which are almost indistinguishable from the loci they inhabit, and ending in magic potions which bring sickness or death. This illustrates a point which I want to bring out here…that the enchanted world, in contrast to our universe of buffered selves and 'minds', shows a perplexing absence of certain boundaries which seem to us essential. (Taylor 32-33)

The line between personal agency and impersonal force becomes fuzzy in an enchanted cosmos. Meanings were not only in the minds, but could be in actual 'charged' things. And these things are embedded with meanings with or without our observation. They can impose their meanings and thoughts upon minds and bring about physical outcomes proportionate to their meanings. They have what Taylor calls, 'influence and casual power'.

The Porous Self stands in an entirely different posture to the world than the Buffered Self does. It is vulnerable and weak, caught in a myriad of forces. But at the same time, it is healable, curable, and, if it gets hold of the right power, it can be 'larger than life'. Thus, its salvation lies in a constant war of attrition, trying to avoid the bad and embrace the good. On the other hand, the Buffered self is not so vulnerable. It allows things to affect it by choice. It voluntarily decides how things impact its mind. Taylor describes this as an entirely 'different existential condition'. For the modern, there is a possibility to take a distance from everything outside of the mind in a moment of radical reflexivity. However, for the pre-modern, the source of its most powerful capacities are outside of the mind, and there is no possibility to disengage from sense-perceptions, sense-data, etc.

This new ability to stand outside of things leads to Taylor's second shift in the way humans see themselves. During early modernity, Descartes, crystallizes the Buffered Self through a novel understanding of reasoning itself. He challenges the scholasticism/neoplatonism

of his day which followed a primarily Platonic understanding of reason. Plato and the ancients saw reason in terms of a human's ability to recognize the perfect Forms and reflect them in one's being. Taylor explains,

> The great ancient ethics, those of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, called for the subordination, or even…the elimination of baser desires…But the dominant image of virtue was that of a soul in harmony. The master idea was of a form which was already at work in human nature, which the virtuous person has to help emerge, rather than of a pattern imposed *ab extra*. Images of reshaping matter, of imposing form, which were the key terms in which they [Enlightenment philosophers] understand human productive activity, didn't have a place in ethics. (Taylor 112)

The pre-Enlightenment idea of reason was dominated by the idea that proper reasoning meant bringing one's self in harmony with one's own nature and the larger cosmos. Taylor elaborates,

> …with Plato, reason in us just is the power to see the order in the cosmos and to love it. Our love of it makes us want to imitate it, and therefore live ordered lives ourselves. The motive force for goodness comes not only from the form we instantiate, but also from the whole ensemble, ordered by the Form of the Good. In other words, the joy or satisfaction comes not only from our following our own nature, but from our being in line also with the whole. (Taylor 76)

As Taylor points out, the "master idea" here and above was that pre-moderns saw reason as the human capacity to see the Divine cosmic order; even then, reason was mostly the subordination of the human to an order already in nature rather than one imposed from outside. After the Enlightenment, all this changed, modern subjectivity sees human agency as active, constructive, shaping and in Descartes famous line, '*maistres et possesseurs de la Nature*'.

Because Descartes was a founder and product of the Scientific Age, he rejected the understanding of the cosmos as an inherently meaningful and ordered whole; rather he saw it as a blind to Divine order. Post-Galilean cosmology changed the place of man. By making the extra-mental mechanistic, Descartes was able to take an *instrumental* stance towards nature and reason.

He began to see reason as a disengaged, neo-Stoic form of instrumentalization. Reason became a tool for controlling nature, and especially human passions. Man became primarily reason and will, as opposed to instinct and passion.

This new control of passions leads to a disciplined self that can use his reason and will to control nature. No longer do fears of demons, spirits, magic, cloud the mind. Rather, the pure light of abstract rationality drives man to control himself through detachment, steadfastness, constancy and a struggled-for domination of the non-rational. We become dispassionate, yet dignified agents of self-control and discipline.

Taylor argues that disengaged reason and buffered identity lead to a ubiquitous uniformity among humanity. The human begins to be seen as fixed to certain limited capacities. This entails seeing the human as a biological animal, with certain appetites, emotions, and needs. This becomes the final characteristic of a modern disenchanted humanity. What is lost is the idea of super-human capacities. Prophets and saints had abilities and capacities out of the reach for ordinary humans. Demons and Satan also enjoyed such abilities. On this view, certain humans embodied sainthood and others, like witches, were possessed by demons. On the other hand, in a modern disenchanted conception of the human social classes, such as castes, social, and political hierarchies become unnatural because there are no super-human capacities. This idea pivots on a certain understanding of the human as essentially equal and uniform in its essential capacities. It sees the human as a species of a particular genus, therefore, non-human capacities within the human are seen with a certain amount of healthy skepticism.

Modern Exclusive Humanism

Taylor ends his story with a grand finale. What arises out of these deeply held metaphysical shifts in our social imaginary is what Taylor calls: modern exclusive humanism. This is a way of looking at the world that champions a particular kind of buffered identity trapped in a materialistically immanent frame. All values, goals and meanings are found within the disenchanted human and projected onto the enclosed universe. It is exclusive because it closes transcendent theocentric experience and collapses it within solely humanistic championing of anthropocentric needs and ordinary desires. For Taylor, exclusive humanism is the cornerstone of modern existence.

Modern humanism is not just an ethical perspective; it is also a thoroughly religious perspective. Since it is woven out of metaphysical critiques of premodern Christian religion, it creates new moralities rather, as some have argued, shutting down morality. For the purposes of this thesis, the insight that is most important is that the deep shifts that inform modern humanism are not, as many have argued, merely ethical or areligious. They are first and foremost religious reforms embraced by Christian Europeans in order to usher in a new conception of the cosmos and man. Only by accepting a particular kind of religious reform can one make humanism the foundational basis for any modern morality. These religious reforms now constitute the basis of many modern ethical perspectives, ranging from liberalism and Marxism to Islamic reform movements and 'deep ecology', all reaffirm their commitment to transforming premodern religion in terms of this new exclusive humanism.

4. COUNTER-ARGUMENTS: KYMLICKA AND NEUTRALITY

History According to Kymlicka

So far I demonstrated how Taylor reads history as the rise of exclusive humanism as a permanent feature of modern society. This humanism is a Western and a thoroughly religious phenomenon. Its permanence is fixed by certain religious reforms put forward by Christians critiquing premodern Christian religiosity. In turn these reforms impacted Western conditions of belief and they go on to form the basis of a long list of new immanent spiritualities.

The reason I find Taylor's detailed narrative important for political philosophy is that it depicts a clearer picture of an often implicit undercurrent found in Kymlicka. Let us revisit Kymlicka's second premise. There he argued that certain conditions of belief, the endorsement constraint and revision, are prerequisites for the good life. I objected to this premise by arguing that it is controversial. There I said that these prerequisites are conditions embodied in modern exclusive humanism. Specifically the idea that living life from the inside, or what Kymlicka denotes as the endorsement constraint relies on already living in a disenchanted world. Modern exclusive humanism sees itself replacing a dying enchanted world. The rise of modern exclusive humanism, via Taylor, is the product of a religious reform project and kind of subtraction story towards modernity.

If I am right about this, then Kymlicka's neutrality becomes more provincial than it seems. Through his second premise he is smuggling in a project of religious reform. One way to clearly see Kymlicka's project of religious reform is to step into the space of the unobjectionable. For Kymlicka, the endorsement constraint is an unobjectionable condition on the good life. But the endorsement constraint is controversial because it assumes a disenchanted humanism. By giving a genealogy on the idea of modern exclusive humanism, Taylor demonstrates how this

humanism is explicitly European and Christian and it further relies on secular history—a narrative that sees the rise of humanism as a loss of premodern Christian religiosity.

One may object to this claim and assert that I am projecting a Taylorian reading of history on Kymlicka. While I think it is explicitly clear that Kymlicka relies on a form of exclusive humanism, I admit that Kymlicka does not explicitly utilize a secular narrative in the way Taylor does. Nevertheless, I still think it is implicit in most of his work. We can make this more explicit by considering his oft-repeated and paradigmatic reading of the 'Wars of Religion' and seeing how similar it is to Taylor's larger read of European history. In discussing the rise of liberal multiculturalism, Kymlicka writes:

> The development of religious tolerance was one of the historical roots of liberalism. Religious tolerance in the West emerged out of the interminable Wars of Religion, and the recognition by both Catholics and Protestants, that a stable constitutional order cannot rest on a shared religious faith. (Kymlicka 155)

Later in an introductory article for a book on Africa, he writes:

> During the Wars of Religion in Western Europe, Catholics and Protestants fought over a century of civil wars to decide which religion should be the official state-sponsored religion. Both sides agreed that there must be an official religion, and that believers in any other religion should be subject to discrimination and persecution. They simply disagreed about which religion it should be. However, when it became clear that neither side had the military capacity to defeat the other, a compromise slowly emerged, which involved the separation of church and state. People would be free to attend whatever church they wanted in private, but the state itself would have no official religion, and it would be indifferent to the religious beliefs of its citizens. This model of a separation of church and state has proved to be surprisingly successful in the West. The division between Catholics and Protestants, which produced untold and unending violence, has now become almost entirely pacified and depoliticized in most Western countries. The state has become more stable by privatizing religion, and religious groups themselves have thrived and prospered without state support or sanction. (Berman 16)

Both of these quotes highlight the central role of Wars of Religion in the formation of liberal multiculturalism. His reading of the Wars of Religion views the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation as periods of immense cruelty perpetrated by two religious warring factions: Protestants and Catholics. Here premodern theo-politics is the source of massive amounts of violence. It demonstrates the inability of premodern religion to rationally agree on mutual tolerance. On Kymlicka's account, this failure of premodern religion eventually leads to the rise of liberal multiculturalism. By privatizing religion, a Protestant imperative, the sate becomes peacemaker among doctrinal difference. The state rises on the basis of religious reform and liberal tolerance is the natural consequence of irrational premodern religious violence.

William Cavanaugh, a theologian and a political theorist, disagrees with this reading of the Wars of Religion. In his extensive article, "A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House: The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State", Cavanaugh argues that liberals often use religious violence as an exceptional form of violence. They specifically cite the so-called Wars of Religions as a moment of uncontrollable religious strife. After surveying a large amount of historical evidence, he concludes that by the 16th century the Church was brought under the control of the state's sovereign. The Wars of Religion were less about religion and more about certain warring monarchies using religious language in order to extend their own power. On a closer examination we observe that in many instances Catholics and Protestants worked together in order to fight other kinds of Catholics and Protestants. The picture presented by Kymlicka becomes even less viable under this scrutiny when we consider the fact that Catholics themselves attacked the Papacy and Rome during this period. Cavanaugh writes:

> The "Wars of Religion" were not the events which necessitated the birth of the modern State; they were in fact themselves the birthpangs of the State. These wars were not simply a matter of conflict between "Protestantism"

> and "Catholicism," but were fought largely for the aggrandizement of the emerging State over the decaying remnants of the medieval ecclesial order. I do not wish merely to contend that political and economic factors played a central role in these wars, nor to make a facile reduction of religion to more mundane concerns. I will rather argue that to call these conflicts "Wars of Religion" is an anachronism, for what was at issue in these wars was the very creation of religion as a set of privately held beliefs without direct political relevance. The creation of religion was necessitated by the new State's need to secure absolute sovereignty over its subjects. I hope to challenge the soteriology of the modern State as peacemaker…
> (Cavanaugh 389)

My point here is not to endorse Cavanaugh's revisionist history over Kymlicka's secular history. It is merely to show that Kymlicka's reading of history mirrors a Taylorian read of history by seeing Protestant reform as a catalyst towards disenchantment. Both the so-called success of proto-modern ideas and the narrative of disenchantment favor a particular theology. This theology chooses to read the Wars of Religion as a failure of premodern religion and therefore sees privatized religion and liberal humanism as its natural consequences. Cavanaugh, on the other hand, shows how this history is contested and premodern Christianity is not especially prone to violence or instability. I think strategically Kymlicka's selective allocation of blame helps justify the conceptual limits around liberal interpretation of tolerance. It reinforces how exclusive humanism in the form of the endorsement constraint and liberal tolerance more generally are natural and unobjectionable. But if we take Taylor seriously, by assuming a secular narrative Kymlicka is in fact endorsing a project of religious reform. In this particular case it is the Protestantization of public religion and its respective shifts in our conditions of belief that make the rise of humanism seem natural.

Intolerance for the Intolerant

My point is not just that Kymlicka's commitment to exclusive humanism and secular histories are intellectually incoherent with neutrality but, unaccounted for, they are pragmatically dangerous. Kymlicka's conceptual construction of liberal ideas leads to *exclusion* of those who disagree with him merely on a conceptual basis—a particular reading of what it means to be human.

In his book on multiculturalism he considers the hard case of illiberal cultures. How should a liberal state respond to societal cultures that do not value freedom of choice or individual autonomy? In this case, the idea of culture advocated by illiberal cultures fundamentally conflicts with what liberal political philosophy thinks of as legitimate claim to culture. These groups do not prize the ability to revise traditional ways of life and in extreme cases; they argue that others within their group should not do so either. An example of this is when cultures assign pre-determined roles in fixed hierarchies such as the untouchables in the Hindu caste system. Another example is when cultures assign women fixed gender roles by denying them certain privileges or rights enjoyed by men. These are examples of entrenched social practices that are blatantly non- liberal, yet possibly dear to some citizens of a liberal state, such as immigrants.

These cultural practices strain liberal tolerance. In chapter 8, Kymlicka explores this issue in some detail. In the middle of the chapter he makes an argument against tolerating illiberal cultures.

While it might be clear that illiberal cultures undermine liberal tolerance, this by itself does not entail intolerance towards illiberal cultures. Kymlicka rather argues that liberal tolerance, properly understood, sees tolerance and freedom tied together in such a way that

designate illiberal practices outside of the scope of tolerance. In this way illiberalism remains a heresy against liberal orthodoxy. He explains:

> Historically, liberals have believed in a very specific notion of tolerance—ones which involves freedom of consciences….Liberal tolerance protects the right of individuals to dissent from their group….It limits the power of illiberal groups to restrict the liberty of their own members…This shows, I think, that liberals have historically seen *autonomy and tolerance as two sides of the same coin.* [emphasis mine] (Kymlicka 158)

What I see Kymlicka doing here is stating a matter of fact—"autonomy and tolerance are two sides of the same coin." He is making a conceptual argument for liberal tolerance. Tolerance as a concept ends when restrictions on autonomy begins. This means tolerance, properly understood, has certain conceptual limits. These limits are marked by tolerance's historical origins.

For Kymlicka, values function in this foundational manner. Let us consider another value that displays the similar limits. Take, for example, the virtue of loyalty. In the tenth book of his masterpiece, *Decameron*, Giovanni Boccaccio writes a story about Griselda a "loyal" wife to the Marquie de Saluzzo. In this literary classic, the Marquie tests Griselda with a number of grueling tests in order to assure her loyalty. He pretends to kill her children, delegitimize their marriage, take a younger, more beautiful wife, and also demand that she prepare the wedding feasts for his second marriage. In order to demonstrate her loyalty, Griselda endures each of these painful trials.

This literary example raises a question, similar to the one we are considering regarding tolerance: should Griselda's loyalty endure self-degradation? There is something discomforting about attributing the virtue of loyalty to Griselda fulfilling the Marquie's degrading demands. One way of understanding loyalty, the way we ordinarily understand it, precludes any demands of

degradation. In fact a more modern reading of the story would argue that under the guise of being a "loyal wife", Griselda is just experiencing open degradation. The Marquie, then, is not demanding loyalty from his wife but something else, perhaps a kind of capitulation to oppression. Therefore, one might reasonably conclude that Griselda was never really tested for her loyalty because loyalty and being respected with dignity are, to use Kymlicka's words, 'two sides of the same coin'. For Kymlicka, liberal tolerance and individual autonomy work in the same way. Liberals tolerating the non-autonomous is like attributing the virtue of loyalty to what are mere acts of degradation. It simply doesn't work *conceptually*.

Here the virtue of tolerance has its limits. These limits ossify around what ultimately grounds that particular value. A liberal conception of tolerance is ultimately grounded by the value of individual autonomy. Therefore, illiberal cultures should not be tolerated because they strain the ultimate source of value.

Provincial and Chrisitan

Kymlicka's understanding that tolerance is conceptually tied to freedom conditioned by his second premise is controversial because it endorses a Taylorian secular story of the natural rise of humanism as a product of religious reform. The claim is not that liberalism is left with a mark of cultural relativism. This kind of story which is necessary for both Kymlicka and Taylor conceptually assume a project of religious reform that is both Christian and European. The secular narrative that is central to Kymlicka and Taylor limit political theory because they in the end exclude those who may not see European history or theology in similar ways.

5. CONCLUSION: THE POSSIBILITY OF IMAGINATIVE POLITICS

By considering the case of Kymlicka's liberal multiculturalism I wanted to see what implications certain autonomy based arguments had on political theory. Kymlicka has a difficult time presenting his arguments as neutral if we examine the nature of his second premise. The controversial nature of this premise presumes a religious reform project as the natural unfolding of secular history. Over the course of the thesis I examined how autonomy based humanism embodies a Taylorian historical narrative and also showed the availability of premodern sensibilities in authors such as William Cavanaugh that may or may not embody a secular reading of the same history. Kymlicka's secular commitments have consequences that lead to a brand of liberalism that is exclusive on the basis of its conceptual limits.

In order to move beyond restrictive conceptions of multiculturalism we must consider a more imaginative politics that does not presume certain restrictions on our conditions of belief and fixed historical narratives.

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