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The Transformation and Transformational Potential of Religion: Modernity, Secularism, and Humanist Chaplaincy

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The Transformation and Transformational Potential of Religion:
Modernity, Secularism, and Humanist Chaplaincy

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

The practice of clinical pastoral care, otherwise termed spiritual care or chaplaincy, in North American and European hospitals provides a case study to explore the historic and ongoing tension between religious worldviews and its *others*. The tension between *religion and* modernity, scientific rationalism, secularity, and humanism, among others, have all been presented in dichotomous and hierarchical either/or terms to justify a social imaginary that sees religion in decline. I will argue, firstly, that the very construction of ‘*religion and ...*’ signifies a particular understanding of religion’s nature and role in the episteme of contemporary western societies; and secondly, that in this context, what we mean by *religion* is currently in flux, that is, ‘religion’ is currently undergoing a significant transformation. Ultimately, I will argue that the transformational potential of religion is not merely its ability to evolve along epistemic shifts but its ability to redescribe the relations between disparate domains. It is within this discursive space that a focus on clinical pastoral care/chaplaincy in modern healthcare contexts provides a particularly appropriate lens through which to reveal the fissures, transformations, and potential for redescription of religion in the 21st century and to begin to imagine its role in mapping the ecological networks between disparate domains. In modern healthcare settings, the role of clinical pastoral care is positioned at a nexus between the patient body, religious or spiritual needs, and a set of totalising secular, materialist, and scientific discourses. A superficial consideration which assumes these narratives to be incompatible will be challenged by a more nuanced analysis showing the mutual imbrication and necessary tension between such worldviews. In this sense my proposed thesis is part of a broader phenomenological analysis of the current constructions of the nature and role of religion in secular society.

Preface

Research and writing for this thesis emerged from an initial curiosity of the spiritual needs of non-religious people, which I felt a vested interest in understanding more deeply. I was baptised and raised in the Roman Catholic Church by parents who encouraged a healthy dose of dissent and never forced participation. While it has been many years since I have attended a Catholic mass, my sense of spirituality is deeply rooted in my upbringing. My appreciation and respect for religion is likely aided by the fact that I have been fortunate not to experience any form of religious abuse. I recognize many individuals have not been this fortunate and respect their desire to hospice religion rather than transform it. As the first generation in my family to be born in Mohkinstsis, otherwise known as Calgary, AB, my lineage on both sides tells stories of migration that has enlivened within me the possibility of transformation at various points and places. Plurality is both a concept I find helpful but is also a deeply rooted experience that I have enjoyed learning about through stories and pictures of my diverse ancestry. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that the bulk of this thesis was researched and compiled during the COVID-19 pandemic. I expected a certain degree of isolation and insanity throughout this process but was not fully prepared for everyone else to join me. It is undoubtable that the political and cultural divisiveness during that time impacted my thinking on how contradictory realities co-exist. It is my hope that this thesis is a small contribution to imagining a new way of being that embraces complexity and reciprocity.

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-For Sarah, through thick and thin-

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Introduction

The tension between ostensible dichotomies such as ‘religion and secularity,’ ‘religion and science,’ ‘transcendence and immanence,’ are predicated on the presumption, arising from the construction of Enlightenment rationality; that religion is a vestige of immature beliefs that ought to be abandoned for objective truths revealed by scientific materialism.¹ From this perspective, religion will inevitably decline as scientific knowledge develops to demystify the mechanics of the natural world, offering neutral and objective spaces deemed ‘secular.’² This story of the inevitable and necessary decline of traditional religious belief and adherence has been called the secularization thesis.³ Within this narrative is the history of hospital institutions and chaplains,⁴ which I will use as an example to discuss the current constructions of ‘religion,’ ‘secularity,’ ‘modernity,’ ‘scientific rationalism,’ and ‘humanism’ to debunk this secularization thesis through various deconstructive techniques.⁵ The development of modern hospital institutions in tandem with progressive biomedical technologies and adjacent forms of spiritual care reveal a complex co-constative relationship that is missed by putting ‘religion’ and ‘secular-materialist science’ in a simplistic dichotomy where science is valued over and against religion.

¹ José Casanova, “The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms,” in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 56.

² Casanova, 67.

³ Casanova, 54-55.

⁴ Throughout this thesis I will use the terms ‘chaplaincy’ and ‘spiritual care’ interchangeably as both refer to a practice aimed at addressing the non-material experience of illness. Because the practice of ‘chaplaincy’ refers to the Christian designation ‘Chaplain’, healthcare providers such as Alberta Health Services, have begun to use the more general description ‘spiritual care’. While most chaplains are ordained by a particular denomination, they would be expected to adapt to the multicultural reality of ‘secular’ institutions. ‘Humanist chaplaincy’ will be defined and used when speaking specifically about the provision of spiritual care through a humanist lens. ‘Pastoral care’ will be used when referencing the traditional, theological provision of spiritual care that would include reading scripture, offering sacrament, and presiding over ritual.

⁵ The ‘deconstructive techniques’ I intend to utilize are for the purpose of destabilizing binary oppositions to show the plurality and fragilization of domains. Jacques Derrida’s project aimed at unsettling the assumptions of the metaphysical tradition in Western philosophy underlies this thesis but is not discussed explicitly, as the primary goal here is not to develop a philosophy of deconstruction. I simply mean to use the techniques as a method to uncover the phenomenon of religion in secular society by addressing the constructed binaries of ‘religion’ and ‘secularity’.

This thesis seeks to explore the points of confluence between religion and its many *others* ('secularity', 'modernity', 'biomedicine', and 'humanism') to show the fractured and fragilized reality of these domains which exist in a polyphony. 'Religion', for my purposes, does not constitute a singular, defined category to be contrasted with a similarly codified antonymy ('the secular'). Instead, 'religion' reflects a protean system relating disparate domains, like that of an ecological network.

The purpose of this thesis is to critically examine the transforming nature of religion in secular society, engaging a philosophical analysis of the dynamic tension between religion and its *others*, as seen in the role and nature of contemporary practices of humanist chaplaincy in modern healthcare settings. While the nature, role, and purpose of humanist chaplaincy is an important discussion *per se*, my interests here will not be focussed on description and analysis of this phenomenon for the benefit of such chaplains or *Spiritual Care Providers (SCPs)*, as they are called within the medical context, but rather to analyze, critique, and delve into what this phenomenon says about religion more broadly. I will argue that the transformational potential of religion is not merely its ability to evolve along epistemic shifts but its ability to redescribe the relation between disparate domains. To do this I will apply a philosophical, conceptual analysis within a phenomenological approach to the academic study of religion. This will entail a philosophical interrogation of the history of ideas and practices of chaplaincy, secularism, and humanism within the context of the mutual development of 'western' religious worldviews in dialogue with their non-religious counterparts. I leverage the work of Charles Taylor, Bruno Latour, and Isabelle Stengers to redescribe the relationship between 'religion and secularism,' 'religion and science,' and 'immanence and transcendence' using an ecological model that allows for collaboration rather than purification.

A Secular Age by Charles Taylor will be used to problematize an antithetical depiction of ‘religion’ and ‘secularity’ to show instead the mutual imbrication of this dyad. Taylor begins his examination of our secular age by wondering how it was possible to go from a time when belief in God was axiomatic, to our present age when belief in God is one option among many, and often the more difficult option of belief.⁶ Taylor’s work is situated within the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology as he is primarily concerned with the ‘conditions of belief’ – the conditions that made secularism a plausible option. So, *A Secular Age* persistently asks, “how did we move from a condition where, in Christendom, people lived naively within a theistic construal, to one in which we all shunt between two stances, in which everyone’s construal shows up as such; and in which moreover, unbelief has become for many the major default option?”⁷ Taylor challenges the subtraction stories of Enlightenment secularization theses by examining the ‘unthought’ or epistemic conditions that have shifted from the medieval period, through the Enlightenment, to the present in order to show the modern notion of ‘secularity’ as a uniquely constructed space with its own set of values and beliefs.⁸ Taylor distinguishes between three different versions of secularity: secularity₁ refers to a medieval definition that differentiated ‘the sacred’ from the earthy plane of domestic life – the *saecula*; secularity₂ refers to Enlightenment definitions that subtract religion from secular spaces which become neutral, unbiased, and objective; secularity₃ presents the secular as a space of religious plurality, in which belief in God is one option among many.⁹ In order for secularity₃ to become a live option, “there had to develop a culture which marks a clear division between the ‘natural’ and the

⁶ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 2.

⁷ Taylor, 14.

⁸ Charles Taylor, “What is Secularity?” in *Transcending Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology: Reason, Meaning and Experience*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer & Martin Warner (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 56.

⁹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 299.

‘supernatural’, and it had to come to seem possible to live entirely within the natural.”¹⁰ Taylor argues that the redescription of the ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ came about intentionally through ecclesial reforms while the transition to living solely within the natural came about rather inadvertently.¹¹ To understand the inadvertent shifts that made living without connection to the transcendent possible, Taylor works to uncover “an underlying picture which is only partly consciously entertained, but which controls the way people think, agree, infer, [and] make sense of the world.”¹² At this level, the moral foundations that give rise to imagining life solely within an immanent frame are clarified and we see that ‘the secular’ is not simply a space devoid of religion but a newly imagined sphere with its own moral foundations, values, and beliefs thus challenging its presentation as neutral, unbiased, and objective.¹³ Taylor ultimately leverages this conclusion to argue for the usefulness of Christian (specifically Catholic) theology in the process of meaning-making, an aspect of his argument that will not be addressed in this thesis.

Reimagining secularity in these terms challenges the placement of ‘religion and secularism,’ ‘biomedicine and spiritual care,’ and ‘immanence and transcendence’ in dichotomous and hierarchical either/or terms. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Bruno Latour articulates the distillation of dichotomies into purified domains as a modern project which, he argues, has never been possible.¹⁴ Latour’s examination of modern epistemologies reveals an ongoing dialogue between social, scientific, political, and economic domains that challenges a binary mode of thinking. Focused primarily on the modern dichotomy between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, Latour challenges the assumption that material causality can be revealed through

¹⁰ Taylor, “What is Secularity?”, 56.

¹¹ Taylor, 56.

¹² Taylor, 59.

¹³ Taylor, 56.

¹⁴ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 130.

certain and fundamental facts by arguing that we are only able to access nature through cultural inscriptions. The moderns, he says, “could criticize the obscurantism of the old powers by revealing the material casualty that those powers dissimulated – even as they invented those very phenomena in the artificial enclosure of the laboratory.”¹⁵ Every experiment is imbued with a subjective perspective, blending together the cultural subjectivity of individuals with the material causality of nature. His primary concern with a myopic pursuit of purification is the propensity to ignore the proliferation of new realities, or ‘hybrids,’ that inevitably emerge from an ongoing interaction between nature and culture. Whether mechanic, biologic, cultural, or political, essentially everything is a hybrid creation between the interaction of these domains.¹⁶ It has been the work of modernity to make invisible, unthinkable, and unrepresentable the work of mediation that assembles hybrids, pursuing instead a purified notion of the natural world that exists unattached to cultural subjectivity.¹⁷ This was the project of modernity that has never been possible. His subjective anthropological inquiry “helps us realize that the world in which we live is not one of distinct spheres in each of which we are confronted directly with truth, power, or money, but one of networks, in which everything we do depends upon the ways in which the world is mediated.”¹⁸ Tracing the mediation between nature and culture, human and non-human actors, presents a network that is best articulated using a metaphor of ecology.

In her book *Cosmopolitics I*, Isabelle Stengers further challenges the pursuit of a purified knowledge system capable of encompassing a total intelligible truth.¹⁹ The ecological

¹⁵ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 30.

¹⁶ Sande Cohen, “Science Studies and Language Suppression – A Critique of Bruno Latour’s *We Have Never Been Modern*,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 28, no. 2 (1997): 339.

¹⁷ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 34.

¹⁸ Charles Turner, “On the Modern Cult of The Factish Gods - About Bruno Latour, On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods (Durham, Duke University Press, 2010).” *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes De Sociologie* 53, no. 3 (2012): 423–28. doi:10.1017/S0003975612000380.

¹⁹ Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

perspective, she argues, invites us to consider the production of new values, new modes of evaluation, and new meanings associated with knowledge-practices that do not necessarily constitute an intelligible truth.²⁰ In this way, descriptions do not aim at things ‘as they are’ but rather constructs ‘practical identities’ that allow for new possibilities to emerge in connection. The ecological model thus, “does not approach practices as they are—physics as we know it, for instance—but as they may become.”²¹ This produces a context in which ‘alternative’ beliefs hold the capacity to produce new relations in a situation already constituted by a multiplicity of beliefs, removing the burden of one knowledge system to encompass a total intelligible truth. This model will be applied to the example of humanist chaplaincy in hospital settings that reveals a tension between biomedicine and spiritual care in which both knowledge systems produce new understandings of the human experience. While these systems of knowledge might be significantly different, the goal is not to find out which one holds purified, empirical truth. Adopting the metaphor of ecology transforms the relationship between religion and biomedicine whereby the multiplicity of interests inherent to the pluralism of our secular age is celebrated and cared for as unique.

To approach the broader phenomenological analysis of the current constructions of the nature and role of religion in secular society, chapter one engages ‘religion’ in terms of its relation to ‘secularism’, ‘modernity’, and ‘humanism’ in order to conceptualize the function of religion beyond a definitive category and to imagine it as a network linking a complex and diverse ecological web. I will provide brief definitions and overviews of key terms and ideas that will serve as an introduction to my main argument. My discussion of these terms will take place

²⁰ Mélanie Frappier, “Isabelle Stengers. *Cosmopolitics*. Trans. Robert Bononno. Vol. 1. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010” *HOPOS* 3, no. 2 (2013): 341–344.

²¹ Isabelle Stengers, “Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices,” *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no.1 (2005): 183–196.

in the context of hospital institutions at the intersection between biomedical narratives and spiritual care. As biomedical technologies advance to produce increasingly detailed depictions of material reality, the role of the chaplain can easily be misunderstood as a foil to these scientific and rational discoveries – a holdover from a past pre-scientific worldview. However, upon closer review, the tension between biomedical care and spiritual care offers a productive example to view the fissures, redescription, and transformative potential of religion in the 21st century. The sustained demand for spiritual care suggests that the algorithmic management of bodily symptoms during times of medical distress is not sufficient in supporting overall patient care. This ‘spiritual’ need is expressed not only by those who identify as religious, but also by individuals who are non-religious or anti-religious. I will argue that encoded within this practice of spiritual care is a series of competing narratives: the person and the role of chaplaincy as understood through the historical trajectory set by traditional religions, through the lens of ‘enlightenment rationalism’ and the materialist science which sprang from it, and the contemporary settlement of humanist and ‘modern’ secularity. The resultant binaries: religion/secularity, biomedicine/spiritual care, immanence/transcendence, are misconstrued as mutually exclusive. My analysis will problematize these binaries to show the interconnectedness of religion and its *others* for the ultimate purpose of tracking the transformational potential of religion in a model of ecology. Focusing on humanism and its practical application in chaplaincy, I will show how humanism perpetuates the modernist project in its desire to separate immanence from transcendence. Tools used to deconstruct this binary will be applied to the broader discussion of ‘religion and secularity’, showing the dyad to be intertwined in an ongoing dialectic that should not be defined in mutually exclusive categories. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the dynamic tensions that exist between domains of ‘religion’, ‘secularism’,

‘modernity’, and ‘humanism’ for the purpose of imagining religion as a connective network rather than a definitive category.

The unresolvable tension between such dichotomies is further developed in chapter two by applying Taylor’s examination of the secular to a historical analysis of the construction of hospital institutions and the shifting role of hospital chaplains. I present Taylor’s primary argument that modernity (and its handmaiden ‘humanism’) emerged out of ecclesial and theological reforms, unintentionally creating the conditions in which meaning can be found solely within the immanent, to show the confluence between ‘religion’ and ‘secularism’. According to Taylor, modernity is not the obvious progression of logic towards an increasingly rational terminus, and secularity is not a space devoid of religion that will inevitably emerge once the old myths are replaced with scientifically proven fact.²² Instead, ‘the secular’ is marked by an expanding plurality of beliefs caused by the mutual interaction between immanence and transcendence. This brings into relief a vast network surrounding ‘religion’ and ‘secularity,’ problematizing a view that one can be either/or. Taylor develops his argument through a historical analysis, which I extend to a discussion of hospital institutions and the role of chaplaincy. Historically, chaplains were clergy members within the Christian tradition, assigned to preside over royal chapels and the relics within.²³ Given their experience as advisors to the monarch and their understanding of religious ritual, chaplains were considered ideal candidates to preside over hospital institutions as they emerged in the 13th century.²⁴ Of course, since this time, Christianity, the role of the chaplain within polity and society, and the function of

²² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 90.

²³ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Chaplain," Encyclopedia Britannica, March 31, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/chaplain>.

²⁴ Christopher Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century: The Crisis of Spiritual Care on the NHS* Second ed. (Farnham: Routledge, 2014), 9.

hospitals, have all undergone significant transformation. How did we go from a time when spiritual care would refer entirely to the management of social and religious realities to the present situation in which it has become one tool among many to achieve material healthcare ends? I will develop a more detailed analysis outlining the modern and contemporary transformation of hospital institutions and the adjoining role of the chaplain both individually and in relation to the other. The contemporary period of my research begins after the Second World War, when hospitals begin to take a recognizable form, and chaplains adjust their work to fit within institutions that claim to be secular.

In chapter three, I rely on Isabelle Stengers to develop this model of ecology as an alternative to the modern social imaginary of secularism as purity.²⁵ Stengers is primarily concerned with scientific epistemologies as they have been developed throughout modernity in terms of its overarching project of discovery and constitution.²⁶ While power relations lurk in the background, her goal is not merely to disqualify such pronouncements on account of their political involvement, but to radically transform the interests in which the sciences are identified.²⁷ Rather than revealing an objective reality, the ecological perspective developed by Stengers invites the production of new values, new modes of evaluation, and new meanings associated with knowledge that do not necessarily constitute an intelligible truth.²⁸ This reveals the ways in which science and non-scientific inquiry engage in reciprocal relations, whereby each is affected by the constitution of the other while simultaneously producing a respective transformation. The provision of humanist chaplaincy in hospital settings will be used as an

²⁵ Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I*, 37.

²⁶ Martin Savransky, "A Becoming Together of the World: The Cosmopolitics of Isabelle Stengers," *Journal of Philosophy: A Cross Disciplinary Inquiry* 7 no. 17 (2012).

²⁷ Savransky, 2012.

²⁸ Savransky, 2012.

example to highlight this complex interrelation as shown in the relation between biomedical conceptions of patient pathology and apparent spiritual needs. The continued demand for spiritual care challenges assumptions that medical care can be provided purely from a biomedical approach. The attempt to graft spiritual care into the biomedical model maintains the modernist project by upholding the scientific system as a straight-forward and transparent reflection of the natural order. The model of ecology reveals the plurality of domains that interact in non-reductionistic ways, highlighting underlying systems of power, and bringing into focus the many realities, people and values that exist as part of a complex web of actors.

My thesis concludes with my own speculative question: in this secular age of plurality, fragilization, and fragmentation, how can multiple, often contradictory truths exist simultaneously? Exploring the nature of religion in secular society surfaces the various methods by which beliefs are formed. I will argue that a binary model cannot accurately describe the fractured realities of ‘religion’, ‘secularity’, ‘biomedicine’, ‘spiritual care’, ‘immanence’ and ‘transcendence’ in terms of their relation and co-production. The plurality that results destabilizes a sense of singular ‘truth’. What are the political implications for contradictory truth claims?

Chapter One

The nature of religion in a secular age

A reasonable starting place to approach the phenomenological inquiry into the nature of religion in secular society is to consider the contemporary landscape of religious affiliation as presented in statistical surveys. According to a Statistics Canada report, approximately 26% of the Canadian population identify as nonreligious, which includes those who identify as atheists, agnostics, and humanists.¹ This is the second largest group identified in the survey after Christians, representing approximately 63% of the population. The number of people identifying as nonreligious has been steadily growing from 12% in 1991, to 16% in 2001, to 24% in 2011. This is the fastest growing segment of the surveyed population.² 54% reported that religious or spiritual beliefs are important or somewhat important, however only 23% reported participation in a group religious activity at least once a month.³ At first blush, these statistics seem to indicate an overall decline in religion and religious participation among Canadians. Such interpretations align with an ‘Enlightenment’ version of the secularization thesis that codifies religion as a set of experiences, beliefs, and doctrines that can be amputated from a body that becomes ‘nonreligious’ or ‘secular.’⁴

The concept of ‘the secular’ originated from medieval orientations of time which differentiated ‘sacred time’ and ‘*saecular* time.’⁵ Religious events in the Christian calendar, such as Lent and Easter, represented ‘sacred times’ while the mundane events of living day-to-day

¹ Louis Cornelissen, “Religion in Canada,” Statistics Canada, October 28, 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2021079-eng.htm>

² Cornelissen, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2021079-eng.htm>.

³ Cornelissen, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2021079-eng.htm>.

⁴ Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, introduction to *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8-9. Charles Taylor, “Western Secularity,” in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 33.

⁵ Casanova, “The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms,” 56.

were considered ‘*saecular*’. Through the Enlightenment, a critique of religion was inflamed by the atrocities of the European religious wars, particularly the Thirty Years War, that saw religious institutions “protecting an arrogant social hierarchy intent on keeping the masses enslaved to superstition and ignorant of justice and reason.”⁶ As religion was attributed to a false and increasingly irrelevant set of doctrines, dogmas, and myths that were used to explain the natural world before we knew better,⁷ the secular was proposed as a space free of such falsities where rationality and universality could flourish.⁸ Developing in tandem was the moral psychology of modern humanism, which understood human beings to be endowed with an innate capacity for benevolence, or altruism, “which will emerge if it is not stifled by unfavourable conditions”⁹ often identified in the oppressive dogmas of religion. Essentially, this story speaks of religion as a perverse and illusory narrative of subjugation that we can eliminate to let the value of ordinary human desire shine out, in its true nature, as it has always been.¹⁰

This version of secularism has been successfully debunked by scholars such as Charles Taylor, Craig Calhoun, and Jose Casanova, who argue the attempt to subtract religion from secular institutions on the grounds of scientific progress presents an overly simplistic narrative, whereas “the reality is much more interesting.”¹¹ Through a nuanced historical account, Taylor argues that the appeal of scientific materialism “is not so much the cogency of its detailed findings as that of the underlying epistemological stance, and that for ethical reasons. It is the stance of maturity, of courage, of manliness, over against childish fears and sentimentality.”¹²

⁶ Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and VanAntwerpen, introduction, 7.

⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 429.

⁸ Craig Calhoun, “Secularism, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere,” in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 76.

⁹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 247.

¹⁰ Taylor, 253.

¹¹ Taylor, 91.

¹² Taylor, 365.

From this perspective, what is appealing about secularism is the position of power and privilege it holds within our society.¹³ Consequently, ‘nonreligion’ or ‘secularism’ should not be seen the mere absence of ‘religion’ but perhaps better reflects a socially imagined system built on certain Enlightenment values, namely those of rationality and universality held to surpass religion.¹⁴

Taylor’s revisioning of ‘the secular’, which will be examined in greater detail in chapter two, challenges the assertion that religion is in decline. By effectively problematizing the Enlightenment version of secularism, the 26% identified as ‘nonreligious’ no longer can be considered *areligious* but instead seem to represent a context in which atheism, agnosticism and humanism have become legitimate options of belief.¹⁵ In this understanding of secularism, the rising number of Canadians identifying as nonreligious does not necessarily prove that religious belief is declining but instead might suggest religion is transforming – or so I shall argue.

The evolution of religion is not a new or unusual phenomena. Christianity has historically responded to shifting social contexts by actively engaging in a series of theological reforms. In *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why*, Phyllis Tickle argues that Christianity has undergone a significant transformation every five-hundred-years, beginning with Gregory the Great in 590CE, then the Great Schism in 1054CE, and the Great Reformation in 1517CE.¹⁶ Each event marks a significant moment within the Catholic Church when empowered structures were forcibly re-evaluated, causing a rupture from which a new, more vital form of Christianity emerged.¹⁷ The institution left in the wake of such transformations was left to

¹³ James K. A. Smith, *How (not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 149.

¹⁴ Casanova, “The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms,” 69.

¹⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 550.

¹⁶ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Michigan: Baker Books, 2012), 19.

¹⁷ Tickle, 20.

reconstitute itself into a ‘more pure’ and less ossified expression of its former self.¹⁸ Now, some five hundred years from the Great Reformation, in the wake of intellectual and technological tsunamis from Michael Faraday to Charles Darwin, there is an attempt to accommodate traditional theology and the culturally and individually diverse expressions of religiosity.¹⁹ The domain of the ‘nonreligious’, particularly in its expression of humanism, might then signal an emergent form of religion. Through this lens ‘nonreligion’ is not an absence of ‘religion’ whereby the two domains are mutually exclusive, rather they appear engaged in a dialogue from which ‘nonreligion’ might be emerging, thus requiring traditionally understood practices and forms of religion to adapt and recalibrate. So, the rise of ‘secularism’ is not simply a matter of purifying ‘religion’ so it can be distilled and extracted, rather the two appear to be interacting in an ongoing and mutually constitutive dialogue.

Humanism is a fruitful example to further examine the nature of religion in secular society. A critical analysis will show that humanism draws heavily from the modern episteme, most obviously in its attempt to purify the immanent from the transcendent, which ultimately limits its transformative potential by aligning itself with Enlightenment narratives that will be shown to be dubious at best.

Humanism and modernity

Humanism has positioned itself as the next evolutionary phase of religion with “all the trappings of religion but none of the dogma or belief in the supernatural.”²⁰ As a worldview or attitude, humanism prioritizes the individual, reason, and (inter)personal connection over a

¹⁸ Tickle, 20.

¹⁹ Tickle, 66.

²⁰ Katherine Ozment, *Grace Without God: The Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Belonging in a Secular Age* (New York: Harper Wave, 2016), 155.

supernatural entity, which is regarded as a “historical, anthropological, sociological, and aesthetic interest, [that offers] a flawed and inaccurate account of external reality and of the human person, an unsatisfying meaning-frame for life, and an implausible basis for ethics.”²¹

The individual is given the primary goal of self-actualization through a process of ongoing critical inquiry that affirms an ability and responsibility to “lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good.”²² While humanists fall into the ‘nonreligious’ category, they are not necessarily radically anti-religious. For some, like Greg Epstein and Gretta Vosper, humanism is an attempt to negotiate between traditional religious practices, technological advancements, and scientific discoveries.

Greg Epstein, a Humanist Chaplain at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), presents humanism as a life stance in his book, *Good Without God: What A Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe*. He concludes that humanism is, “the melding of a comprehensive philosophy with a world tradition and deeply practical ethical and social commitment. Regardless, for better or worse or both, modern, organized Humanism began, in the minds of its founders, as nothing more nor less than a religion without a God.”²³ The founder he references is John Dietrich, who established one of the first humanist churches because he recognized that a congregational community offered a powerful means for people to join together to celebrate knowledge and ethics.²⁴ Epstein carefully restates that humanism or humanist churches were not founded with the intention to rationally disprove religion but rather

²¹ Andrew Copson, “What is Humanism,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of Humanism*, ed. Andrew Copson, and A. C. Grayling (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2015), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucalgary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=2044666>, 25.

²² “Definition of Humanism,” American Humanist Association, accessed April 2, 2023, <https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/definition-of-humanism/>.

²³ Greg M Epstein, *Good Without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe* (New York: William Morrow, 2009), 169.

²⁴ Epstein, 170.

emerged as part of a critical reimagining to develop new ways for religion to thrive in secular society. He argues that there can be good alternatives to religious rituals, cultural identity, and community that do not include connection to God.²⁵ While his intention might be to reimagine religion, Epstein's reverence of science as a logical disproof of God inadvertently condemns theism to a sort of irrationality, which is a primary critique against the Enlightenment secularism thesis. Epstein does clarify, "secular culture is not the same as Humanist culture, and that sometimes the former falls far short of the latter."²⁶ However, the relation between these domains throughout his writing is, at times, indistinct.

Gretta Vosper, an outspoken atheist Minister in the United Church of Canada, leads her congregation with humanist principles. She believes that religion without God²⁷ is the next step in our evolutionary path of spirituality. Considering our many scientific and technological advances, she suggests there is too much evidence to believe in God and (conveniently), "we don't need God to live a good life."²⁸ For her, humanism sufficiently supports deep relationships that lead towards greater spiritual and psychological well-being, which need not hinge on supernatural forces or liturgical dogmas but, rather, on a willingness to confront the complexity of our world.²⁹ Religion, she argues, is simply a means to build community whereby such work can be done in collaboration.³⁰ Vosper is attempting to build a congregation that utilizes the positive functions of religion, while editing out histories of theology that have, she argues, kept us separate from each other and the natural world.³¹

²⁵ Epstein, 220.

²⁶ Epstein, 74.

²⁷ Vosper is referencing a monotheist theistic definition of 'God' that relates to mainstream, traditional Catholic and Protestant theologies. Unless otherwise stated, I will maintain this definition in future references.

²⁸ Gretta Vosper, *Amen: What Prayer Can Mean in a World Beyond Belief* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2014), 168.

²⁹ Vosper, 170.

³⁰ Vosper, 170.

³¹ Vosper, 170.

Positioning humanism as the next step in the evolution of religion is convincing because it maintains some traditional functions of religion, such as community in congregation, values-based morality, and a method for making meaning, while acknowledging the many scientific discoveries and technological advances that prioritize the human intellect against a transcendent supernatural deity.³² So, the leap from ‘old’ to ‘new’ forms of religion avoid God, leaving it behind as an immature explanation of the world before we knew better. Epstein presents humanism as compatible with modern sensibilities and certain Enlightenment values:

Humanism embraces the morality of the secularized, urbanized, interconnected world, even with all its uncertainty. We accept with enthusiasm the modern proposition that all people must be free to make basic choices about the shape of their family life: whom to love, whether to have children, how to structure a family... Humanists are *progressives*, meaning that, though we may disagree in good faith on particular economics, security, or social policies, we believe we have the opportunity and the responsibility to help make *progress* toward a world that will be fairer and more just, more loving and accepting of difference than the world we are handed by the fates³³

Epstein thus aligns humanism with secularism and modernity by embracing a moral order that prioritizes the individual and the material as neutral arbiters of certainty, legitimizing an ethics of independence, self-control, and self-responsibility. All of this is possible by drawing a linear trajectory of progress inevitably leading to a more just, fair, and loving world than could be imagined by irrational chance.

Aligning itself with certain Enlightenment narratives that see reason as snuffing out religion to make way for the rise of a modern world governed by science, humanism imagines individuals as being able to ‘think for themselves’ by refusing to accept anything that is not based on evidence.³⁴ Epstein validates this by presenting his practice of humanist chaplaincy as a deep examination of individual situatedness based on unfettered rational inquiry, open to

³² Vosper, 171.

³³ Epstein, *Good Without God*, 133.

³⁴ Matthew Engelke, “Good Without God: Happiness and Pleasure Among the Humanists,” *HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5, no. 3 (2015), 75. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/10.14318/hau5.3.005>.

constant questioning, in the search to confirm or deny intuitions.³⁵ Humanism constructs morality by rationally assessing what is right, or good, to be “that which facilitates human dignity and the health of the natural world that surrounds us and sustains us. The bad, or evil, is that which creates needless human suffering.”³⁶ This leads to a focus on the temporality of the here-and now, the immanent experience of being in the world which can be verified with “knowledge rather than belief: fact rather than feeling.”³⁷ Striving for evidential truth according to scientific methods becomes a central aspect of humanist virtue. As a democratic and ethical life stance, humanism affirm that human beings have the right and responsibility to develop their own meaning in life rather than being forced to adapt theistic assertions of morality.³⁸ Meaning is not something that exists ‘out there’ but something that is deeply embedded in personal expressions of a moral life.³⁹ In this context, morality is achieved through a mental state that brings about a sense of integrity: “a security in the knowledge that we have done our best not only for ourselves but for others. When in this state toward which we strive, we have been generous enough to know that we are strong.”⁴⁰

Humanism, while acknowledging its religious lineage, naïvely insists scientific discoveries produce certain and fundamental facts about the natural world, in which God cannot be proven and should therefore be regarded with suspicion.⁴¹ Humanism similarly adopts a simplistic understanding of religion as a set of doctrines, dogmas, and myths that were used to explain the natural world before we knew better and an equally simplistic view of God as a traditional, supernatural, Christian deity that has “caused so much of the religious wars and

³⁵ Epstein, *Good Without God*, 10.

³⁶ Epstein, 137.

³⁷ Engelke, “Good Without God: Happiness and Pleasure Among the Humanists,” 81.

³⁸ Brian Ellis, introduction in *Social Humanism a New Metaphysics* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 5.

³⁹ Copson and Grayling, “What is Humanism,” 22.

⁴⁰ Epstein, *Good Without God*, 107.

⁴¹ Engelke, “Good Without God: Happiness and Pleasure Among the Humanists,” 81.

sectarian hatred [between] people who agree wholeheartedly with one another that we must follow God's purpose but slaughtering each other over sometimes tiny differences of opinion about what God said his purpose happened to be."⁴² By subtracting God and religion from the project of meaning-making, humanists construe meaning-making as an individual choice based on, "how you as a human being should relate to other human beings in this world."⁴³ This reflects much of the Enlightenment version of secularism as it affirms that God can and should be subtracted because it is false, science shows this to be true, and doing so will ultimately create greater harmony in society.⁴⁴ Both Enlightenment secularists and humanists utilize scientific materials to justify their fixation on the immanent, natural world. From this vantage point, irrational, subjective, and inaccurate concepts can be weeded out.⁴⁵ Removing the transcendent as a backstop for meaning-making requires the immanent to swell as a self-sufficient domain in which fulfillment can be wholly found. Humanists then fixate on the immanent as a 'true' and obvious domain, against which the transcendent becomes an inaccurate representation that can be avoided. This desire to purify the immanent from the transcendent can be placed within a larger modernist project aimed at purifying the natural world from the subjective murk of social realities. This modernist project has ultimately failed because it ignores an ongoing and necessary convergence between seemingly disparate domains, which can be seen in the ongoing tension between immanence and transcendence.

What follows is an overview of Latour's argument in *We Have Never Been Modern*, which will be applied in this thesis to challenge the presentation of religion and its *others* in

⁴² Epstein, *Good Without God*, 66.

⁴³ Epstein, 67.

⁴⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 433.

⁴⁵ Adam Frank, Marcelo Gleiser, Evan Thompson, "The Blind Spot," Aeon, last modified January 8, 2009, <https://aeon.co/essays/the-blind-spot-of-science-is-the-neglect-of-lived-experience>.

dichotomous and hierarchical either/or terms. I argue that the truly transformative potential of religion is not merely in its ability to update its content along epistemic shifts, but in its ability to renegotiate the relations between various and disparate domains. This will be seen in humanism's inevitable reckoning with the tension between immanent and transcendent, and more clearly in the example of humanist chaplaincy in hospital settings that stands at the convergence between 'religion and secularity' and 'biomedicine and spiritual care'.

For Latour, "modernity has nothing to do with the invention of humanism, with the emergence of the sciences, with the secularization of society, or with the mechanization of the world."⁴⁶ Rather, modernity's originality and its strength come from its conjoined production of 'nature' and 'society', intermingling between 'immanence' and 'transcendence' while simultaneously asserting the separate treatment of these domains.⁴⁷ Latour recognizes a pattern in modernity that seeks to present 'nature' and 'culture' as fundamentally distinct, as if the former can be purified to a natural, objective, 'true' state in contrast with the latter as essentially cultural and subjective. While he recognizes this as a common tendency, he is unconvinced by its efficacy, cautioning, "let us not draw the conclusion that from now on subjects are removed from things."⁴⁸ The desire to purify nature is fraught because all our tools and technologies, from laboratories to sensations, mediate the natural world through a set of subjective, cultural filters that inevitably blend nature with society. Latour argues that every tool, method, laboratory, and scientist is embedded within a cultural system of beliefs that will necessarily impact the representation of nature.⁴⁹ Therefore, nature and culture are constantly interacting to produce 'hybrids' that reflect both the natural world and cultural systems.

⁴⁶ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 34.

⁴⁷ Latour, 13.

⁴⁸ Latour, 29.

⁴⁹ Latour, 30.

Interactions between these domains synthesize new entities (both physical and nonphysical) that populate our world, which Latour refers to as ‘hybrids.’⁵⁰ Everything is a hybrid and should be understood as such. The proliferation of hybrids is not his concern per se, it is the disregard of hybrids in pursuit of a purified representation of nature that is his concern.⁵¹ He says: “if we consider hybrids, we are dealing only with mixtures of nature and culture; if we consider the work of purification, we confront total separation between nature and culture. It is the relation between these two tasks that I am seeking to understand.”⁵² Latour reminds us that hybrids live and act in the world, demanding our attention. We ignore them at our peril.

The interaction between nature and culture is governed by a set of underlying assumptions, which Latour codifies as ‘the modern constitution’. Latour defines this firstly by the separation between “the natural world (constructed, nevertheless, by man) and the social world (sustained, nevertheless, by things)”⁵³ and secondly by a total separation between “the work of hybrids and the world of purification.”⁵⁴ Hybrids reflect instances of communion between the natural and social worlds, while the work of purification is the singular pursuit of the natural world, which Latour ultimately problematizes given its human construction. The ‘modern constitution’, as Latour delineates as it relates to the modern episteme, is explained as an incoherent set of guarantees. Latour defines it as follows: (1) we construct Nature, but it’s as if we didn’t; (2) even though we don’t construct Society, it’s as if we did; (3) Nature and Society must remain distinct: the work of purification must remain distinct from the work of mediation.⁵⁵ Latour observes these incoherencies in an expanded version of the modern constitution: “we

⁵⁰ Latour, 2

⁵¹ Latour, 10-11.

⁵² Latour, 30.

⁵³ Latour, 31.

⁵⁴ Latour, 31.

⁵⁵ Latour, 32.

have not made Nature; we make Society; we make Nature; we have not made Society; we have not made either, God has made everything; God has made nothing, we have made everything.”⁵⁶ Despite being incoherent, Latour shows how this scheme maintains itself by allowing a continual deferring of one’s own position without obvious contradiction. We can slip from a state of pure nature to subjective society so long as we can keep the two mutually distinct. The incoherence of this position is meant to show the modern project aimed at distilling nature from culture is fundamentally impossible.

Concerned with modernity’s value distinction between primary and secondary qualities, Latour repositions science from an abstracted position of apolitical prestige into a subjective arena of discourse in which it must contend with a diversity of perspectives and viewpoints. To do this, Latour’s uses a “deconstructive anti-foundationalist claims to challenge the entrenched de-politicisation of techno-science.”⁵⁷ Adding non-human actors to this pantheon of political relations through his definition of ‘hybrids’ which act in the world and therefore deserve representation. The process of hybridization is intended to show a collaboration between human and non-human in its construction. Nature is no longer a “static universe of entities assumed to be already real and awaiting our discovery,”⁵⁸ but instead becomes a dynamic process engaged in its own construction. In this context, science ought to be “the election of entities to be included in the common world, with the inevitable repercussion that is the exclusion of those the collective has decided not to take into account.”⁵⁹ For Latour, reality is negotiated between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ in a dialogue that defies purification.

⁵⁶ Latour, 34

⁵⁷ S. J. McGrath, *Thinking Nature: An Essay in Negative Ecology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 81.

⁵⁸ McGrath, 82.

⁵⁹ McGrath, 82.

Latour thus provides a framework to engage seemingly disparate domains in a dialectical process that avoids positions of objectivity by inviting instead a nuanced relationality. In the case of humanism, its attempt to purify immanence from transcendence quickly falters as a constant interaction between these seemingly disparate domains remains since they co-define each other. Despite asserting their disregard for the supernatural, humanists continue to grapple with the constant intermingling of immanence and transcendence. It appears in Epstein's discussion of meaning-making as he recognizes, "by ourselves we are not enough. We need to reach out beyond ourselves – to the world that surrounds us and sustains us, and most especially to other people."⁶⁰ But while one is contained by the immanent, the action of reaching out *beyond ourselves* is an act of transcending our immediate autonomy. Vosper is more explicit about the transcendent in her practice of meaning-making, which she says requires a climbing *over and across individual boundaries* to seek wisdom through conversation and connection.⁶¹ She encourages prayer as a practice that feeds our soul, supports community cohesion, places us within the universe, and engages our passions:

We need what is outside of us – beyond us – too, intermingling it with what is within – a transimmanence that has been the source of all the good we have experienced, whether we've attributed it to something supernatural or simply the normal unfolding of life. The immanent, that which is within, *instinctually* reaches for those things we cannot achieve on our own. At the same time, the presence of resources we need to make the difference we see necessarily – the transcendent – pulls us beyond our sense of self-sufficiency and presses us out into the open, where the new thing, whatever it is, can happen⁶²

As both Epstein and Vosper show, humanism seems to encourage a practice of meaning-making that is fixed within the immanent frame but is also aware of something beyond, something transcendent. As such, it is in tension between these two realms.

⁶⁰ Epstein, *Good Without God*, 93.

⁶¹ Vosper, *Amen*, 176.

⁶² Vosper, 212 (italics added).

Purifying ‘immanence’ from ‘transcendence’ is not possible because the two are an interconnected dyad – one is not possible without the other. The desire to resolve light and darkness leaves us either in a white-washed room or in complete darkness; in neither place can we see. It is the shadows, the contrast, that allows us to perceive reality, just as it is the intermingling of the immanent and transcendent that allows meaning to flourish. Similarly, there exists a required tension between ‘religion and nonreligion’ and ‘religion and secularism’ for either domain to exist. This tension develops a sense of ‘religion’ against the ‘nonreligious’, not as a lack, but as part of a connection or *relation between*. I will now explore this further by using the example of humanist chaplains, who provide semi-spiritual or spiritual support to nonreligious patients experiencing a loss of meaning during existential challenges brought on by illness.⁶³ The purpose of my argument is not to collapse the ‘religious’ and ‘nonreligious’ into one category for the purpose of proving a pervading experience of religiosity (easily countered by the possibility of pervading experience of secularism) but to support an ecological network model between domains to challenge the modern episteme of purification. I first provide a brief introduction to both the ‘biomedical model’ of healthcare and humanist chaplaincy before a more comprehensive discussion of their mutual imbrication.

Humanist chaplaincy within biomedicine

The relatively recent phenomenon of humanist chaplaincy in the medical context reveals an ongoing communion between ‘secularism and religion’, ‘biomedicine and spiritual care’, and ‘immanence and transcendence’, within incoherent imaginaries of universal, purified, objective

⁶³ Carmen Schuhmann and Annelieke Damen, “Representing the Good: Pastoral Care in a Secular Age,” *Pastoral Psychology* 67, no. 4 (2018), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11089-018-0826-0>, 406.

‘facts’ of reality. As shown above, humanism relies on certain Enlightenment narratives that serve to perpetuate the modernist imaginary. Given Latour’s argument that the modern project has never been possible, the project of humanism should be regarded with similar suspicion as it slips incoherently between asserting the certitude of immanence as a natural, objective, and value-free domain progressively revealed through science, while simultaneously acknowledging that something about our immanent experience escapes us. The purpose of Latour’s critique, and my purpose of applying it to humanism, is not to challenge humanism’s legitimacy as an emergent form of religiosity, but to bring into focus the complex network surrounding and sustaining its existence. As Taylor argues, humanism is not “the only viable set [of values] left after the old myths and legends have been exploded.”⁶⁴ That is, humanism is not the obvious progression of religion, moving from irrationality to increasing rationality. Instead, humanism should be regarded as a historically constructed set of values and beliefs, with its own positive visions of the good.⁶⁵ From an ecological perspective, the value of Taylor’s argument is to identify humanism as both an emergent form of Christianity and a historically constructed locus of tension between the rational and irrational, bound to the immanent and pressured by the transcendent. This irreducible complexity challenges the modern project of purification and allows contradiction, fragmentation, and plurality to exist. This ‘ecological web’ surrounding humanism can be clearly seen in the example of humanist chaplaincy in hospital settings.

The hospital, as Peter Berger describes, it is often seen as a temple of modernity with a single overwhelmingly secular discourse dominating the narrative as the “corridors reverberate with the humming of sophisticated machinery supposedly based on the latest scientific and

⁶⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 571.

⁶⁵ Taylor, 571.

technological achievement.”⁶⁶ This highly secularized setting is dominated by the biomedical narrative, which has tended to subordinate ‘spiritual care’ to the *real* business of scientific, technologically advanced, and highly bureaucratized health provision.⁶⁷ The biomedical narrative reduces illness to a biological pathology producing signs or physiological abnormalities that can be assessed and measured by clinical and laboratory technology, then ordered as a set of complaints from most important to least.⁶⁸ The body is logically re-ordered into a mechanistic series of ‘truths’, revealed using scientific instruments, as straightforward depictions of the natural order without cultural inflection or human bias.⁶⁹ The stethoscope, ophthalmoscope, laryngoscope, x-ray, and microscope – instruments frequently used by biomedical professionals – garner ‘objective’ data that contribute to increased efficacy in the diagnostic process. The image produced by the x-ray or MRI is not inflected with subjective assumptions about the psychological, social, or moral conditions of the bone, these superficial layers are peeled away to view the pure biological structure.⁷⁰ Bryon Good summarizes the biomedical approach as promising, “a straight-forward and transparent reflection of the natural order revealed through the dense semiotic system of physical findings, laboratory results, and the visual products of contemporary imaging techniques.”⁷¹ At this bedrock of truth, health care professionals can assess things simply ‘as they are’.⁷²

⁶⁶ Peter Berger, “The Hospital: On the Interface Between Secularity and Religion,” *Society (New Brunswick)* 52, no. 5 (2015), 411.

⁶⁷ Larry VandeCreek, “Professional Chaplaincy: An Absent Profession?” *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 53, no. 4 (1999), 431.

⁶⁸ Bryon Good, *Medicine, Rationality and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511811029>.

⁶⁹ Charles Longino and John Murphy, *The Old Age Challenge to the Biomedical Model: Paradigm Strain and Health Policy* (Amityville: Baywood Publication, 1995), 16.

⁷⁰ Arthur Kleinman, *Writing at the Margin - Discourse Between Anthropology and Medicine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 30.

⁷¹ Good, *Medicine, Rationality and Experience*, 10.

⁷² Kleinman, *Writing at the Margin - Discourse Between Anthropology and Medicine*, 36.

Despite this materialist shaping of illness, “moral and ‘soteriological’ issues (that is, those referring to suffering and salvation) are fused with the medical and at times erupt as the central issue of medical practice.”⁷³ While biomedicine constructs knowledge as if the empirical world is impressing itself on the human mind via the senses, we might alternatively position human knowledge as causally derived a priori from characteristics of the human mind.⁷⁴ In a Foucauldian sense, biomedicine is as practice that forms the objects of which it speaks, articulating and revealing distinctive forms of experience. The physical, material reality of the body is one significant aspect of the individual construct, but it is not the only one. Culture forms another essential component of the complex ways that individuals experience self and other.⁷⁵ While biomedicine perceives the material world, it is practiced in a medical context that “is a medium of experience, a mode of engagement with the world. It is a dialogical medium, one of encounter, interpretation, conflict, and at times transformation.”⁷⁶ From this point of view, medical care functions not merely at the level of biological individualism but necessarily interacts with the subjective state of individual minds that *experience* suffering. Narratives that imaginatively link experience and corporeality help counter the existential burden of illness by reconstituting the world.⁷⁷ The ongoing demand for forms of care that address the experience of illness function as an essential component of care that aim at an overall sense of well-being.⁷⁸ The need for holistic care is often serviced by practices of ‘spiritual care’. Modeled on the traditional provision of pastoral care, ‘spiritual care’ is an intervention of empathetic listening,

⁷³ Good, *Medicine, Rationality and Experience*, 67.

⁷⁴ Good, 67.

⁷⁵ Good, 76.

⁷⁶ Good, 86.

⁷⁷ Good, 118.

⁷⁸ “Spiritual Care Services,” Alberta Health Services, January 30, 2023, www.albertahealthservices.ca/services/page13213.aspx.

religious ritual, and prayer.⁷⁹ What is meant specifically by ‘spiritual’ remains poorly defined in the profession of chaplaincy and medical discourses.

Addressing spiritual well-being across the illness trajectory has been shown to “positively impact patient coping, survival, meaning in life, and post-traumatic growth, while simultaneously mitigating against spiritual psychosocial distress”⁸⁰ among both patients and health care professionals. The Canadian Association for Spiritual Care website notes that spiritual care improves patient satisfaction, promotes faster recovery from illness, and decreases overall length of stay in hospital.⁸¹ The case for spiritual care, and hence the need for hospital chaplains, highlights a need for religious or spiritual care that belies the algorithmic management of bodily symptoms during times of medical distress. As this ‘spiritual’ need is expressed by both those who identify as ‘religious’ and those who identify as ‘nonreligious,’ it reveals a point of intersection between seemingly incompatible domains to reveal a complex inter-connection that a metaphor of purification cannot aptly describe.

The traditional provision of pastoral care in health care settings was grounded on a formal relationship between centralized health care systems and church institutions, as seen in England’s National Health Services (NHS) and the Church of England.⁸² Pastoral care, as it was termed then, typically a faith-based activity, employed clergy to visit their parishioners in hospital and presides over critical events. Their role was diffuse and undefined, often without an

⁷⁹ Tracy A. Balboni, et. al., “State of the Science of Spirituality and Palliative Care Research Part II: Screening, Assessment, and Interventions,” *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 54, no. 3 (2017): 445.

⁸⁰ Shane Sinclair, et. al. “Patient and Healthcare Perspectives on the Importance and Efficacy of Addressing Spiritual Issues Within an Interdisciplinary Bone Marrow Transplant Clinic: A Qualitative Study,” *BMJ Open* 5, no. 11 (2015), 10.1136/bmjopen-2015-009392.

⁸¹ “Spiritual Care,” Canadian Association of Spiritual Care, April 1, 2023, <https://spiritualcare.ca/explore-spiritual-care/spiritual-care>.

⁸² Margaret J. Orton, “Transforming Chaplaincy: The Emergence of a Healthcare Pastoral Care for a Post-Modern World,” *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 15, no. 2 (2008), <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/10.1080/08854720903152513>.

explicit mandate to meet the spiritual needs of the patient population. In this model there was no established practice of care, standardized training, or defined accreditation process.⁸³ It relied on local church groups and/or individual hospital organizations to independently acknowledge and fund the service. A significant downfall of this model was their religion-focused, clergy-dominated care providers did not align with the multifaith, multicultural and secular narratives of the hospital, and so the patients who were likely to receive this service already had some connection to the faith community offering such care, and those outside of this community were likely to receive limited or inappropriate forms of spiritual care.

The rebrand to ‘spiritual care’ in the 20th century was thought to be more palatable to patients from diverse faith backgrounds (including those without any identified faith tradition) and therefore seemed to fit within the multifaith hospital environment.⁸⁴ As a service available to more patients, spiritual care moved under hospital administration through centralized funding. Alberta Health Services currently employs approximately thirty-six Spiritual Care Practitioners whose mandate is to support and/or foster spiritual well-being in patients and families recognizing that spiritual health is an important component of patient overall well-being.⁸⁵ Spiritual care providers (SPC’s) are trained to embrace a holistic approach, attending to an individual’s unique beliefs, values, behaviours, and experiences of spirituality, religion, culture, and/or transcendence.⁸⁶ To meet these expectations, chaplains may receive training in academic courses to broaden their understanding of diverse religious traditions for the purpose of

⁸³ Orton, 116.

⁸⁴ Orton, 116

⁸⁵ “Spiritual Care Services,” Alberta Health Services, April 1, 2023, <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page15763.aspx>.

⁸⁶ “Health Care and Religious Belief,” Alberta Health Services, June 2015, <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/programs/ps-1026227-health-care-religious-beliefs.pdf>.

encouraging “respectful dialogue without proselytizing.”⁸⁷ They are trained to “invite but not demand”⁸⁸ conversations about individual spiritual and religious concerns. The multi-faith and multi-cultural values of Canadian society recognize that even those who identify as nonreligious still “have spiritual beliefs and practices often adopted from a variety of spiritual traditions and do not identify with any one religion. [...] The use of spirituality and spiritual care is meant to create a common language and concepts in discussing faith issues with patients.”⁸⁹ By encouraging a practice of neutrality, spiritual care is intended to seek commonalities between otherwise disparate experiences.

Practically speaking, humanist chaplains negotiate traditional, faith-based forms of spiritual care and a modern, post-religious milieu by combining the traditional delivery of pastoral care with the worldviews of humanism to offer a form of spiritual care that does not prescribe to the beliefs or traditions of any specific faith tradition.⁹⁰ Humanist chaplaincy developed as an attempt to move beyond the traditional, religion-based model of spiritual care to a humanist-based model aimed at addressing the well-being and resiliency of individuals facing existential challenges.⁹¹ Jaap van Praag was a key figure in advancing the profession of humanist chaplaincy in health care, prisons, and the army.⁹² He was the founding father of the Dutch

⁸⁷ Thomas St. James O'Connor and Elizabeth Meakes, “Three Emerging Spiritual Practices in the Canadian Association for Spiritual Care (CASC): From Pastoral Care and Counselling to Multi-Faith, Evidence-Based Spiritual Care and Psycho-Spiritual Therapy,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 75, no. 4 (2021), 280.

⁸⁸ O'Connor and Meakes, 280.

⁸⁹ O'Connor and Meakes, 280.

⁹⁰ Barbara Pesut, et. al. “Hospitable Hospitals in a Diverse Society: From Chaplains to Spiritual Care Providers,” *Journal of religion and health* 51, no. 3 (2012), <https://link-springer-com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/article/10.1007/s10943-010-9392-1>

⁹¹ Timothy A. Thorstenson, “The Emergence of the New Chaplaincy: Re-Defining Pastoral Care for the Postmodern Age,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 66, no. 2 (2012), <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/10.1177/154230501206600203>.

⁹² C. M. Schuhmann, et.al., “Humanist Chaplaincy According to Northwestern European Humanist Chaplains: Towards a Framework for Understanding Chaplaincy in Secular Societies.” *Journal Of Health Care Chaplaincy* 27, no. 4 (2021): <https://doi.org/10.1080/08854726.2020.1723190>, 2.

Humanist League in 1946, the Humanist Educational Institution in 1963, and played a key role in founding the International Humanist and Ethical Union in 1952. He developed humanist chaplaincy, not in opposition to the dominant Protestant or Catholic theology of the time, but as an alternative to those who did not prescribe to a particular religious tradition.⁹³ Recognizing the value of spiritual care mediated by chaplains, humanism was used as the framework to guide people in meaning-making in the face of nihilism.

The role of the humanist chaplain is loosely placed within a project to help people orient themselves towards a meaningful life. While humanists, like modern secularists, have removed God as the primary reference, there is a sustained need for some ‘vision of the good’ – a vision of a life worth living – that can be imagined within immanent terms.⁹⁴ Hospital chaplains are called to meet with patients facing loss, illness, or death – events that can easily shatter a vision of a life worth living, igniting existential questions that can lead to a loss of meaning. The chaplain must work to reorient the individual so they can once again vision the path towards meaning.⁹⁵ Traditional forms of pastoral care utilized rituals as waypoint of transcendence to meaning-making, while the humanist chaplain responds to the plurality of the secular age by providing immanence as a valid point of reference.⁹⁶ Individuals are then encouraged to find what is meaningful for themselves, accepting that there is a plurality of possible paths. Chaplains, regardless of their tradition, “do not promote a fixed vision of the good but rather represent the possibility of somehow, eventually, connecting to some good that is not rendered

⁹³ Schuhmann, et. al., 4-5.

⁹⁴ Schuhmann and Damen, “Representing the Good: Pastoral Care in a Secular Age,” 408.

⁹⁵ Schuhmann and Damen, 409.

⁹⁶ Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century*, 136.

utterly meaningless by suffering and evil.”⁹⁷ The need to maintain focus on a moral life continues regardless of one’s religious identity.

This persistent need reveals an ongoing dialogue between ‘the religious’ and ‘the secular’ within the biomedical system. Rethinking pastoral care as a practice of “supporting people, organizations, and societies in dealing with the complex tasks of searching for moral truth reveals the enormous potential of pastoral care in a secular age.”⁹⁸ This potential, I argue, requires thinking beyond the religious/secular dichotomy, not for the purpose of resolution but, as I will develop later, to reveal a system of collaboration engaged in ongoing dialogue.

The recognized impact of spiritual care points to an unresolved tension in our modern age that has, on the one hand, dismissed the presence of a transcendent, while at the same time reaches for something beyond the immanent and material. Taylor describes this as a feeling of being cross-pressured, where we are caught between the echo of the transcendent and the drive towards ‘immanentization.’⁹⁹ This, he argues, is the essence of secularity₃ – an imaginary that is neither purely scientific nor fundamentally religious, but rather pressured by both.¹⁰⁰ Before arriving at his conclusion in the next chapter, I will outline the historical narrative Taylor provides to understand the conditions in which humanist chaplaincy can exist. In tandem with my overview of Taylor’s narrative, I will present the history of chaplaincy within hospital institutions as the locus to practically interrogate the settlement between religion and secularism.

In this chapter, I have queried our idea of ‘religion’, showing its dependence on dissonant concepts like secularism, modernity, and humanism. The purpose of defining religion in references to its many *others* was to show the necessary dialogue between domains, revealing a

⁹⁷ Schuhmann and Damen, “Representing the Good: Pastoral Care in a Secular Age,” 410.

⁹⁸ Schuhmann and Damen, 415.

⁹⁹ Smith, *How (not) to be Secular*, 140.

¹⁰⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 594.

co-constative relationship. This stands to challenge attempts aimed at resolving the tension between seemingly disparate dichotomies that lead either to collapsing the pair into each other or driving towards a purified domain, both of which are problematic. I have introduced the work of Taylor and leveraged the work of Latour to show some of the problems with purification. My brief introduction of Taylor described the Enlightenment model of the secularization thesis as an evacuation of religion to the personal or the slow death of religion because we now have science. Recent scholarship has successfully interrogated the validity and coherence of this thesis, proving it to be empirically false. Latour offers a theory that shows the project of purification to be untenable because such distillation neglects subjectivity and mischaracterises the political motivations that describe the natural world. I extend Latour's argument to the discussion of religion and its *others*, specifically in the between 'religion and humanism', in which the latter differentiates itself by detaching from a connection to the transcendent. I proposed humanist chaplaincy as a locus to examine the complex interaction between these seemingly disparate domains. Caught in an impossible tension between purely immanent biomedicine and some implicit, unsaid, vision of transcendence, humanist chaplaincy must negotiate its position within (or outside) the modernist project.

The following chapter will track the development of this secular sphere in tandem with the development of hospital institutions, providing a tangible example by which to conceptualize the intersection between 'religion and secularism', 'immanence and transcendence'. Through this examination, a model of religion will be developing, highlighting its capacity to connect such dichotomies. Later chapters will explore the possibilities of negotiating the position of such domains through the example of spiritual care as practiced by humanist chaplains within a healthcare context.

Chapter Two

Shifting episteme

In the previous chapter I began to challenge the Enlightenment secularization thesis, with its modern project of purification, as an insufficient model to consider the ongoing interactions between disparate domains as seen in the example of humanism and humanist chaplaincy. In this chapter, I will deepen my analysis of the contested and constructed nature of ‘religion’ in relation to ‘the secular’ using current scholarship that posits such dichotomies as false. I will focus particularly on Charles Taylor’s seminal work, *A Secular Age*. There Taylor presents the history of secularity as a series of ecclesial reforms that had the unintended consequence of creating the conditions whereby secular humanism could become a legitimate option.¹ Humanism, he argues, is not an inevitable outcome of rational observation, rather it functions as a system of beliefs “carved into shape by a powerful theory which posited the primacy of the individual, the neutral, the intra-mental as the locus of certainty.”² He interrogates humanism as a series of unconscious beliefs particular to our secular age that in fact reveal the invention of modernity rather than its inevitability. Through this lens ‘nonreligion’ or ‘humanism’ is not the rational critique of ‘religious’ conditions in search of an alternative, nor is ‘secularism’ the absence of ‘religion’ in search of objectivity. Rather, what results is a complex intermingling of these domains that produce expanding options for belief, of which unbelief is one among many.³ Alongside Taylor’s narrative, I will weave a historical narrative documenting the development of hospital institutions and the shifting role of hospital chaplains to realize the theory posited by Taylor.

¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 95.

² Taylor, 559.

³ Taylor, 299.

This will help establish a foundation from which the current state of hospital chaplaincy can be analyzed.

Unconvinced by the secular Enlightenment thesis, Taylor proposes an alternative showing the indirect trajectory along which humanism became a legitimate option, latent with its own set of values and beliefs. As mentioned previously, Taylor clarifies the various expressions of secularism by identifying three versions: secularity₁ refers to the classical differentiation between *saecular* and sacred time; secularity₂ assumes the secular to be a neutral, unbiased, objective space devoid of religion; and secularity₃ is a context of contested belief where God is no longer axiomatic.⁴ Secularity₂ tells a subtraction story, which Taylor dismisses as an overly simplistic account of time progressing linearly from an age of irrationality that used myth to make meaning, to an age of truth and reason, whereby the decline of religion is inevitable given the facts of science.⁵ Dissatisfied with this account, Taylor develops an alternative theory of secularity in which believing otherwise is not simply *unbelief*, or lack of religious belief, but is a context in which various forms and new modes of belief are possible.⁶ Taylor develops his notion of secularity₃ through an in-depth historical analysis contextualizing the moral foundations of modernity, ultimately challenging the assumption that secular humanism is the inevitable outcome of rational progress. Taylor seeks to describe the epistemic water we swim in by articulating certain assumptions we take for granted, namely the construction of the individual as an autonomous entity called to make meaning in an enclosed, self-sufficient, naturalistic universe, in order to highlight the constructed nature of our social imaginary.⁷ Taylor's insight

⁴ Taylor, 423.

⁵ Taylor, 90.

⁶ Smith, *How (not) to be Secular*, 47.

⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 141. Taylor's articulation of the construction of the individual throughout the modern period mirrors Michel Foucault's discussion of the modern episteme in his essay "What is Enlightenment?" that responds to an identically named article by Immanuel Kant who suggested Enlightenment was marked by its desire to replace ecclesial authority with reason alone. Foucault notices a unique tendency in Kant's writing that reveals a

that secularity³ is not a *given* can be applied to my discussion of religion and its many *others* to further problematize a tendency to purify such domains in dichotomous and hierarchical terms. If humanism is not the inevitable next step in the evolution of religion, then the relationship between religion and its many *others* is not a zero-sum game and must therefore be reimagined in more complex terms.

I will apply Taylor's lens to the historical development of hospital institutions and the role of chaplaincy from the medieval period to its current biomedical settlement. As hospitals are presently considered secular institutions, both in terms of their religious neutrality and in their grounding of medical care in scientific rationalism, they provide a useful example to explore the complex intersections between religion and its *others*. Despite the many scientifically rooted advances within medical care, the role of chaplain as a spiritual support persists in serving an aspect of the patient's needs apparently not satisfied by medical treatment.⁸ As noted in the previous chapter, continued demand for spiritual support to address certain existential needs suggests that a purely immanent frame is insufficient and foregrounds the lurking need for transcendence. This ongoing tension between immanence and transcendence, evidenced in the example of humanist chaplaincy, reflects the broader construction of religion in secular society revealing an interconnectedness that is not aptly described by purity narratives. Before arriving at this conclusion, I will review the historical analysis presented by Taylor to engage with some of his key insights.

new (Enlightenment) trend that imagines one's individual stake in history. Foucault thus presents modernity as the move to invent oneself (Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" trans. Catherine Porter in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Vintage Book, 2010), 41).

⁸ Balboni, et. al., "State of the Science of Spirituality and Palliative Care Research Part II: Screening, Assessment, and Interventions," 445.

Taylor begins his narrative in the medieval period to establish certain elements of the social imaginary that shifted in response to ecclesial reforms brought about by the Reformation. In tracing this history, Taylor attempts to show how certain reforms spawned unintended consequences which produced the conditions whereby meaning and significance could be found without any appeal to the divine or transcendent, thus presenting the immanent and the individual self as the locus of meaning.⁹ Through his historical analysis, Taylor ultimately shows that modernity or secularism did not emerge as the rational evaluation of certain medieval conditions in search of an alternative. Rather they are the result of specific contingencies. He comes to this conclusion by meandering through five hundred years of history to enliven a sense that such epistemic shifts were nonlinear and very likely unintentional, thus challenging the anachronistic reading, prevalent in Enlightenment secularization theories, that sees modernity as the linear progress from irrationality to increasing rationality.¹⁰

Beginning his historical analysis in the medieval period, Taylor notes a primary element of the medieval worldview was a sense of porosity between the self, the broader community, and an external reality enchanted with pervading spirits and forces that could act upon the body for better or worse.¹¹ Objects, like the Host or relics, were invested with a spiritual power that could affect change on the physical body.¹² This can be seen in the example of Catherine of Sienna, a medieval mystic, who expressed extreme devotion to the ritual of Eucharist as the transubstantiated flesh of Christ because of its ability to transform the physical body into the flesh of Christ.¹³ Catherine worshiped the transformative power of the Eucharist by refusing all

⁹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 146.

¹⁰ Taylor, 90.

¹¹ Taylor, 35.

¹² Smith, 35.

¹³ Carolyn Muessig, *The Stigmata in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 143.

other forms of food to ensure her bodily purity at the time of Communion, where, on one occasion, she miraculously encountered the divine and received invisible stigmata as a mark of her connection to Christ.¹⁴ This example highlights the widely held belief at the time that divine forces could act directly on the body to cause physical transformation.

Another key element of the medieval imaginary was the acceptance of a clear social hierarchy that managed a series of social bonds to maintain a sense of mutual benefit despite yawning disparities.¹⁵ The monastic orders were expected to devote their spiritual practice to the larger social body who, consumed with tasks of daily living, did not have the capacity to focus with sufficient attention on their spiritual salvation and therefore relied on the monastic orders to protect them vicariously.¹⁶ The formula was, “the clergy pray for all, the lords defend all, the peasants labour for all”¹⁷ and despite the inequities between these orders, each were considered essential to the overall functioning of society. Taylor notes the festival of Carnival as an example to highlight how medieval societies sought to manage the disparities without necessarily seeking to resolve them. The function of Carnival can be interpreted in various ways: a time to indulge in mockery and mayhem; a simple acceptance of innate human foolishness that must necessarily rise up; a humorous way to bring people together; or, as Taylor argues, an experience to manage the weight of virtue which was so heavy that “so much steam built up under this suppression of instinct, there had to be periodic blow-outs if the whole system were not to fly apart.”¹⁸ Carnival was thus not intended to reform the established order, but rather maintained inherent inequities

¹⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 167; Muessig, *The Stigmata in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* 144.

¹⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 42.

¹⁶ Taylor, 43.

¹⁷ Taylor, 45.

¹⁸ Taylor, 46.

by managing inevitable frustrations through expression of excess that would ultimately renew social bonds.

The porous worldview and resultant social bonds of the medieval period are reflected in the early structure of hospital institutions and in the role of chaplains. Early hospital institutions were established as extensions of the monastery because prayer and ritual were used as the primary modalities to treat illnesses, assumed to be caused by evil or demonic forces that penetrated open and vulnerable bodies.¹⁹ The perceived connection between illness and supernatural intervention constructed religious practices as essential to healing, and the chaplain as the necessary guide.²⁰ In tandem with their oversight of religious observation, chaplains were expected to maintain social bonds through prescriptions of intercessory prayers.²¹ Patrons were encouraged to make charitable contributions to the hospital by purchasing intercessional prayers that would ensure their salvation, while patients were guided to make daily prayers of penance as part of their commitment to the patrons and ecclesial orders. Hospitals served both as a source of salvation for the wealthy elite, who bought the intercessional prayers, as well as a passive space to indoctrinate the sick-poor through their immersion into a locus of religiosity that collected their prayers.²² The dangers of a porous self and the practice of intercessional prayers maintained social bonds and were essential to the early structure of hospitals and role of chaplains. The organization of hospitals and adjoining role of the chaplain underwent significant transformation following the Protestant Reformation as greater emphasis was placed on cognitive discernment and individual spiritual authority.²³

¹⁹ Guenter B. Risse, *Mending Bodies, Saving Souls: A History of Hospitals* (New York: Oxford University, 1999), 78.

²⁰ Risse, *Mending Bodies, Saving Souls*, 78; Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century*, 12.

²¹ Risse, *Mending Bodies, Saving Souls*, 106.

²² Risse, 106.

²³ Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century*, 25; Phillip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling, *Re-Forming the Body: Religion Community and Modernity* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 44.

The Protestant Reformation and subsequent ecclesial reforms attempted to resolve the mutual frustrations between the clergy (who felt the laity were let off the eternal hook), the monastics (who felt burdened by the weight of virtue), and the laity (who wanted opportunities to participate in practices of faith).²⁴ To address this, a wide range of reforms sought to “make over the whole society to higher standards”²⁵ by effectively granting greater spiritual authority to individuals, allowing reading of scripture and subsequent ability to access spiritual salvation through individual practices of faith. Consequently, priests were no longer considered the sole arbiters of spiritual salvation, as individuals were empowered to activate their own spiritual power through their own interpretation of scripture.²⁶ Protestant reforms prioritized linguistic symbols and narratives (specifically scriptural narratives) over all other sensory knowledge, and thus relocated meaning from the external world *into* the mind.²⁷ In this new context, “significance no longer inheres in things; rather, meaning and significance are a property of minds who perceive meaning internally.”²⁸ The external world was emptied of pervading spirits and became a mechanistic order that could be rationally understood through cognitive discernment. The development of cognitive discernment resulted in imagining the intellect to be a powerful agent capable of comprehending a divinely ordered world. Slowly, the mind came to be seen as a ‘buffered’, insulated, and isolated space that could interiorly interpret an external world.²⁹ In contrast to the porous self, the buffered self is impervious to the enchanted cosmos, invulnerable, and master of its own meaning.³⁰ This subtle but significant shift reordered a sense

²⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 61-62.

²⁵ Taylor, 63

²⁶ Mellor and Shilling, *Re-Forming the Body* 42.

²⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 77, 131; Mellor and Shilling, *Re-Forming the Body*, 43.

²⁸ Smith, *How (not) to be Secular*, 29.

²⁹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 131.

³⁰ Taylor, 38-39.

of self that was liberated from its social ties, newly capable of determining meaning independently.

Allowing individuals to take on greater responsibility for their spiritual and religious pursuits required reimagining the social bonds that were previously created by a tension between the demands of creaturely life and the expectations of eternal life. In contrast to externalizing rituals like Carnival, the process of reforms led to different strategies to resolve these tensions, that is by ‘spiritualizing’ the temporal and bringing the religious life out of the monasteries in to the saeculum.³¹ By expanding the sphere of sacred life to encompass domestic life, the laity were able to continue their daily tasks with a new sense of devotion.³² As a result, it was no longer just the priests and nuns who were considered religious; “the butcher, baker and the candlestick maker can also undertake their mundane, ‘this worldly’ tasks with a sense of devotion and worship.”³³ The effort to bridge the gap between the religious and the secular resulted in an “interiorization of religion, and thus a certain deritualization, desacralization, or demagicization of religion.”³⁴ If religion could have been practiced in the secular, then the ritual, spiritual, and sacred realms lost their purchase on life. Here, Taylor notes a historical irony; “so much the fruit of devotion and faith, prepares the ground for an escape from faith, into a purely immanent world.”³⁵ As God becomes more fully present in everyday life, people come to see these contexts with a new significance and solidarity that eventually leads to people ignoring the need for God because the immanent has taken on such significance. Once everything is divine, nothing is. And so, we can “re-order things as seems best.”³⁶

³¹ Casanova “A Secular Age: Dawn or Twilight,” in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, eds. Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig J. Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010), 275.

³² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 81-82.

³³ Smith, *How (not) to be Secular*, 37.

³⁴ Casanova, “A Secular Age: Dawn or Twilight,” 276.

³⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 145.

³⁶ Taylor, 80.

No longer deterred by older taboos or supposedly sacred orderings, the natural world takes on greater significance as a means to express religiosity by rationally discerning the mechanistic workings of reality put into place by God.³⁷ “This involved the growth and entrenchment of a new self-understanding of our social existence, one which gave an unprecedented primacy to the individual.”³⁸ Faith becomes a private option, disentangled from any sense of communal repercussions, whereby individuals are empowered to create their own meaning in cognitive discernment. An individual’s choice to believe or not to believe no longer had broader social implications, as traditional social bonds were restructured around individual atomism. With this, there is a sense that “God’s goals for us shrink to the single end of our encompassing this order of mutual benefit he has designed for us.”³⁹ God becomes a deistic agent, an eternal watchmaker who created the world but is no longer active within it, and the immanent becomes a scrutable set of wheels and pinions. Apprehending this order unhooks the transcendent as a superfluous addendum.⁴⁰

The rise of Deism perpetuates the value placed on cognitive discernment, but what Taylor wants to highlight is this practice was motivated by theological reasons. An important feature of Deism was its attempt to reduce God’s demands to the immediate achievement of human Good whereby “the need for grace and a sense of mystery are no longer relevant because the order God designed is easily apprehended by reason.”⁴¹ This is clearly seen in the example of Rene Descartes (1596-1650CE), who considered developing the intellectual capacities of the mind as akin to acquiring the divine standard of knowledge.⁴² Descartes’ distrust of perceived physical

³⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 80.

³⁸ Taylor, 146.

³⁹ Taylor, 221.

⁴⁰ Taylor, 151.

⁴¹ Daniel Ross, “A Secular Age [Book Review of Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age* (2007)]” *Thesis Eleven*, no. 99 (2009): 118.

⁴² Bertrand Russel, *The History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc, 1972), 559.

sensations sets the stage for a method of ‘scientific’ interpretation whereby certain and fundamental truths about immanent reality could be revealed in unbiased terms but for theological reasons.⁴³ This suggests a goal of becoming “maitres et possesseurs de la nature,”⁴⁴ to use Descartes’ phrase, which allows us to imitate God while maintaining obedience to him. But, as this scientific model got caught up in the Enlightenment, such discernment took precedence in a system of knowledge contrasted with the beguiling false metaphysics proposed by medieval theologians.⁴⁵ The rise of secularism during this time was not inevitable, nor was it an obvious attempt to disprove particular aspects of religious theology, instead it was made possible by theological shifts associated with reforms that began to distinguish immanence as self-sufficient. It is unfair to “anachronistically impose the accomplishments of secular humanism as the necessary end of such a shift.”⁴⁶

The organization of hospital institutions and role of the chaplain developed (transformed) in lockstep with the changing episteme, thus offering a helpful example to further examine Taylor’s argument. The discrediting of indulgences impacted charitable donations that were essential to the maintenance of hospitals prior to the Reformation. Such financial issues pushed hospitals to the care of local and national governments to be financed by subscriptions or government taxes.⁴⁷ In this new context, hospitals were empowered to exercise gatekeeping to select patients based on their seeming compliance with societal ethics of individual virtue, often expressed in their willingness to work.⁴⁸ The most deserving patients were those who were, “barely above the poverty level but seemingly content with their status in society as bestowed by

⁴³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 131.

⁴⁴ Rene Descartes, *Discours de la Methode*, Part II, in *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam et Paul Tannery (Paris: Vrin, 1973), Volume VI. 62, quoted in Taylor, 113.

⁴⁵ Taylor, “What is Secularity?” 69.

⁴⁶ Smith, *How (not) to be Secular*, 44.

⁴⁷ Risse, *Mending Bodies, Saving Souls*, 216-217.

⁴⁸ Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century*, 29.

Divine Providence,”⁴⁹ and the hospital stood to “engender outward compliance and evidence of moral conduct.”⁵⁰ Under the control of civic authorities, hospitals were further enmeshed in new schemes of social control that offered more than “an assurance of last rites, holy burial, and eternal salvation.”⁵¹ Hospitals moved away from focusing on rituals, ornaments, or other artifacts of faith to protect against invading spirits, and instead began enforcing civil values of order and obedience to induce bodily healing.⁵² The hospital institution functioned as a segregated space to bring the uncontrollable whims of human nature under control.⁵³ When emotional fluctuations or uncontrollable whims proved impossible to control, an enormous degree of anxiety crept into society that saw grotesque bodies, deformed by illness, as out of control – a sign of moral and social decay.⁵⁴

Voluntary hospitals emerged to improve the moral and spiritual state of patients who were diagnosed with idleness.⁵⁵ Patients were expected to be well-behaved and grateful for the treatment they received, and to offer a public testimony of the usefulness of the hospital.⁵⁶ Lack of compliance or disagreeable behaviour would lead to expulsion, which became a tool to inspire fear and enforce civil standards of order and obedience.⁵⁷ As institutions that were separate from the Church, voluntary hospitals relied on private sources of funding and philanthropy, which decreased the demands to strictly observe religious ritual.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the perceived failure of traditional hospitals to “resolve the problems of the sick-poor was part of the context in which

⁴⁹ Risse, *Mending Bodies, Saving Souls*, 217.

⁵⁰ Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century*, 29.

⁵¹ Risse, *Mending Bodies, Saving Souls*, 218.

⁵² Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century* 25.

⁵³ Swift, 26.

⁵⁴ Mellor and Shilling, *Re-Forming the Body*, 45.

⁵⁵ Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century*, 29.

⁵⁶ Swift, 31.

⁵⁷ Swift, 31.

⁵⁸ Swift, 34.

voluntary hospitals gained both financial support and social relevance.”⁵⁹ In voluntary hospitals there was no chapel or focal point of religiosity. Clergy would visit the hospital but were not resident, and chaplains were no longer expected to oversee daily rituals, but instead become a comfort and guide to those who needed to amend their life into more conventional living.⁶⁰ Swift notes, “it is quite possible that this marks the first time that the role of chaplains becomes in some measure external to the power systems of the hospital.”⁶¹

Following the industrial revolution, workhouse and adjoining infirmaries experienced tremendous growth and governmental support on the assumption that these institutions were the most desirable places to treat certain social and medical conditions, once again thought to be caused by idleness.⁶² While still deeply embedded in the overarching moral foundations of the church, workhouses were not overtly religious institutions, leaving the chaplain in a vague and interstitial role.⁶³ Chaplains during this time were still connected to their church, however they remained considerably independent from the workhouse governors: “In practice, the chaplain had a broad and ill-defined job description: to be a friend to the sick and poor, to offer structured rites and comfortable words, and to moderate the excesses of institutional life.”⁶⁴ Essentially, the chaplain was responsible for reconciling the sick to the status quo through biblical and theological understandings – that God had determined the social order through Divine Providence and that faithfulness required an individual acceptance of one’s circumstances.⁶⁵ Despite compulsory religious observance, the workhouse was primarily under the control of a national system reliant on state policy, and as such, taxes and philanthropy. So, the rise of

⁵⁹ Swift, 34.

⁶⁰ Swift, 37.

⁶¹ Swift, 35.

⁶² Swift, 35.

⁶³ Swift, 38.

⁶⁴ Swift, 39.

⁶⁵ Swift, 39.

hospitals as ‘secular’ institutions was not a clear reaction to religion as an incompatible worldview, but a result of a more complex history of bureaucratic and political change overlapped with religious developments. In many ways, hospitals moved out of Church jurisdiction for practical reasons, such as funding issues, as well as state oversight of social integration and punishment.

From the Reformation onward, ‘illness’ moved with increasing specificity to the physical body.⁶⁶ As new boundaries were imagined between the self and others, between the self and emotions, and between the self and bodily functions, illness came to be seen as an individual’s cultivation of vice that required treatment framed by discipline, order, and civil obedience.⁶⁷ In the developing view, surgeons and physicians took on greater authority examining by the physical body, and chaplains were charged with supporting patients to petition God for a ‘working spirit.’⁶⁸ The chaplain reflected the new religion of the state, where temporal and spiritual powers are united, by supporting the patient to comply with civil authority through individual prayers that would help them become a willing and effective worker, well-behaved, and publicly grateful for the usefulness of the hospital.⁶⁹ Generally speaking, the role of chaplaincy was configured to support patients compliance with the new civil order by guiding a deepened sense of personal responsibility.

Applying Taylor’s historical lens to the example of hospital institutions and role of chaplains reveals a fundamental assumption about ‘secularism’ and the decline of religious practice. While humanists tend to present their worldview as the next step in the evolution of

⁶⁶ See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic an Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A.M. Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1975).

⁶⁷ Mellor and Shilling, *Re-Forming the Body*, 44.

⁶⁸ Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century*, 29.

⁶⁹ Swift, 35.

religion, Taylor presents a context in which unbelief becomes conceivable not because it is logical or evolutionary, but because certain conditions allowed a defined sense of individuality to emerge. This sense of individuality appears in hospitals as a threat to the social order and idleness. Chaplains are conscripted to these public and social ends also because religion had become interiorized. Taylor thus cautions against anachronistic readings that imposes secularism as straightforward progress that assumes truth and goodness as the terminus, when it very likely could have turned out differently.⁷⁰ The reforms that enacted an epistemic shift and created space for individualism and the possibility of unbelief must always be understood within a religious context that sought to distinguish immanence from transcendence on theological grounds, not as assumed, empirical, inevitable progression.

The secular age

Our present age, marked by its debt to Enlightenment thinking, has established a social imaginary that tells a story in which “the obscurity of the olden days, which illegitimately blended together social needs and natural reality, meanings and mechanisms, signs and things, gave way to a luminous dawn that cleanly separated material causality from human fantasy.”⁷¹ The attempt to purify nature from culture, or the attempt to purify the immanent from transcendent, exemplifies the narrative of this imaginary. In this age, ‘science’ comes to be revered for its ability to define nature in objective truths, which can be discerned by carefully separating the material from the immaterial/unconscious/social/symbolic, lumped together as vestiges of yesteryear that were inept or approximate.⁷² The desire to separate nature and culture

⁷⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 90-91.

⁷¹ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 35.

⁷² Latour, 36.

aligned with theological reforms that redescribed God's place in the cosmos to that of abstract observer, and source of Divine Providence but no longer enchanted within it.⁷³ The modern episteme is marked by an assumption that it can "mobilize Nature, objectify the social, and feel the spiritual presence of God, even while firmly maintaining that Nature escapes us, that Society is our own work, and that God no longer intervenes."⁷⁴ This is the heart of the subtraction story Taylor criticizes. The subtraction story assumes that "once religion and metaphysical beliefs fall away, we are left with ordinary human desires, and these are the basics of our modern humanism."⁷⁵ The purpose of his historical analysis is to show secular humanism is not the natural telos of human life – we learned it.

The modern fixation on material causality finds its roots in the ecclesial reforms that construed the immanent as self-sufficient. In this imaginary, human flourishing and meaning are no longer measured against a transcendent because the material becomes all that there is. Consequently, a new system of morality arises that focuses on the organization of society for mutual benefit rather than obligations to a higher or eternal authority.⁷⁶ Taylor defines this system as 'the modern moral order' which is adjacent to the modern episteme in that it points towards a set of underlying assumptions particular to a specific historical period, revealing a collective consciousness that is in fact constructed and malleable.⁷⁷ While the medieval episteme is marked by a sense of porosity and necessary social structures, the modern episteme is marked by a growing sense of individualism embedded in a project of purification that marginalizes the transcendent, making it increasingly irrelevant.⁷⁸ Taylor identifies four important norms set out

⁷³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 222-223.

⁷⁴ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 34.

⁷⁵ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 253.

⁷⁶ Smith, *How (not) to be Secular*, 142.

⁷⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 93-94.

⁷⁸ Taylor, 143

in the modern moral order: (1) individuals hold responsibility between them, independent of an overarching hierarchical order; (2) securing the needs of ordinary life is the primary focus; (3) individual rights are protected as essential for securing the freedom of agents; (4) securing individual rights, freedoms, and mutual benefit must be for all individuals equally.⁷⁹ Humanism perpetuates these norms in the practices of chaplaincy, pastoral leadership, and counselling,⁸⁰ and in so doing maintains a key feature of the current episteme: that is the fundamental distinction between immanence and transcendence and the drive towards purifying immanence. This in turn makes it possible to realize these norms as legitimate sources of meaning. Taylor wants to remind us that secular humanism is something we made, it is an achievement, it is not something that emerged once error and superstition was removed.⁸¹

Taylor challenges the sense of humanism's inevitability by pointing to a curious experience of secularity³, that is, the sense that once humanism becomes a legitimate option, "unbelievers begin to have doubts – which is to say, they begin to wonder if there isn't something 'more.'"⁸² Taylor points to art and romanticism as proof that people long for something beyond. We saw this earlier in the example of patients who continue to request spiritual care despite sophisticated biomedical care. This reveals a vague sense of resistance to the reductionism of modern materialism. Taylor identifies this feeling as being 'cross-pressured' – caught between the drive towards immanence in the echo of transcendence.⁸³ It is in being

⁷⁹ Taylor, 170-171.

⁸⁰ Four main approaches are identified in humanistic counselling: the individual is assumed to be capable of and naturally striving towards individual growth and, ultimately, self-actualization; individual excellence, virtue, and wisdom is assigned to rational and critical thinking capacities; meaning cannot be found from an external authority and must be individually developed and uniquely chosen; individuals are immersed in a social and political network that they are responsible to and for (Carmen Schuhmann, "Counselling and the Humanist Worldview," in *The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of Humanism* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2015), 176-181).

⁸¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 254-255.

⁸² Smith, *How (not) to be Secular*, 61.

⁸³ Smith, 140.

stuck in this cross-pressure that Taylor argues we develop a sense of malaise: a lack, loss, or emptiness that presses on the immanent realm.⁸⁴ Humanism suggests, on the one hand, that this nagging pressure can be resolved purely within the immanent realm, but on the other hand fumbles to articulate the need for what is beyond us though intermingled with what is within, “whether we’ve attributed it to something supernatural or simply the normal unfolding of life.”⁸⁵ As discussed earlier, Vosper presents the “normal unfolding of life” – the immanent – as somehow also transcendent, capable of pulling us beyond our sense of self-sufficiency.⁸⁶ By arguing for a ‘transimmanence’ she exemplifies the incoherence of the modern constitution by first asserting the need for transcendence then the next moment saying this can be found within the immanent. She and others attempt to purify the immanent while simultaneously drawing on and ignoring its constant interaction with the transcendent. What this shows is that the meaning she seeks cannot be found within a purified domain, because such a domain does not exist. Rather, meaning authentically emerges from the *interaction* between seemingly incompatible signs, and more specifically, from the cross-pressure between immanence and transcendence.⁸⁷ Therefore, a social imaginary fixated on purifying one domain from the other cannot effectively support the project of meaning-making and must therefore be replaced with an alternative that avoids such a collapse. I will argue that a fuller ‘ecological’ model does just this.

Humanism, exemplified in humanist chaplaincy, maintains the norms that simultaneously divide immanence and transcendence, cutting the transcendent off as an irrational and illegitimate option for meaning. In doing so, it sheds the sense that humanity’s end transcends its current configurations and asserts that we, as individuals, can figure out the world and we can

⁸⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 302.

⁸⁵ Vosper, *Amen*, 212.

⁸⁶ Vosper, 212.

⁸⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 598.

make it meaningful.⁸⁸ This mindset is at the core of humanist chaplaincy which aims to support meaning through a highly individualistic approach, whereby each individual must decide for themselves what is meaningful.⁸⁹ Essentially, it is the belief that meaning is “developed within our human context and not measured against the rightness or wrongness in accordance with some greater purpose.”⁹⁰ The focus then becomes the material, immanent world which can be observed, determined, predicted, and described, ideally through scientific theories that avoid inherited dogma or claims of revelation.

The norms of the modern moral order further govern conceptions of illness and forms of treatment, seen clearly in the rise of biomedicine. The legitimacy of the biomedical narrative is affirmed in its ability to precisely observe the cause of illness at a microbiological or genetic level using the ‘objective instruments’ of science, in order to intervene with life-saving treatment.⁹¹ Built as a progressive system developed through the cumulative results of experimental efforts, biomedicine asserts biological categories as natural and ‘descriptive’ rather than essentially cultural and ‘classificatory.’⁹² Through the microscope, scientists observe bacteria (for instance) as ‘true facts’ that can be known, identified, and treated with technical solutions proven to be consistently effective.⁹³ Bacterial cells do not hold a particular cultural position, they do not say something about the moral status of the patient effected; they are simply there – independent, neutral, and ‘true.’⁹⁴ The values of observability, objectivity, and truth align

⁸⁸ Smith, *How (not) to be Secular*, 55.

⁸⁹ Copson and Grayling, “What is Humanism?” 22.

⁹⁰ Copson and Grayling, “What is Humanism?” 22.

⁹¹ Kleinman, *Writing at the Margin - Discourse Between Anthropology and Medicine*, 87-88.

⁹² Good, *Medicine, Rationality and Experience*, 3.

⁹³ Longino and Murphy, *The Old Age Challenge to the Biomedical Model: Paradigm Strain and Health Policy*, 20.

⁹⁴ Biomedicine tends to describe ‘truth’ using a correspondence theory as it relates to certain facts about the natural world. This model of truth implies that (a) facts about the natural world exist, and (b) we can access these facts objectively. Latour and Stengers are sceptical of correspondence theories of truth, aligning more closely with pragmatic theories which focus on the relationship between truth and epistemic practices (ie. inquiry and assertion). The implication of these theories of truth will be discussed in later sections of this thesis.

with the modern project fixated on the immanent as the primary locus of meaning, and calls for “the courage to face the fact that the universe is without transcendent meaning, without eternal purpose, without supernatural significance.”⁹⁵ Biomedicine, as it is woven into the broader concept of modernity, imagines a trajectory of progress in which humanity moves from a state of irrationality to increasing rationality by means of a scientific method that gains greater precision over time.⁹⁶ The facts of nature revealed through scientific observation, presented as ‘objective truths’, are not signified beyond immanent reality. Classifications that assume a cultural orientation, transcendent meaning, or eternal purpose are seen as antithetical to the scientific method, condemned for their irrationality and threat to social reality.⁹⁷

Although biomedicine dominates the social reality of our present age, contemporary reflections challenge its ability to provide holistic patient care. Emerging critiques show biomedical care to be more effective when complemented with more subjective forms of care including a comfortable hospital environment, pleasant and sympathetic personnel “whose interventions are designed not only to counteract the effects of disease but also to address the emotional and spiritual needs of those who suffer within hospital walls.”⁹⁸ The request for chaplaincy in hospital institutions points to a subjective experience that is not addressed by the biomedical model and thus reveals a tension between material and immaterial expressions of illness and corresponding methods of care. Despite the ascendancy of biomedicine’s description of the immanent, material world, there remains a constant feeling that something escapes us, that something exists beyond a strictly material reality.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Smith, *How (not) to be Secular*, 77.

⁹⁶ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 90.

⁹⁷ Good, *Medicine, Rationality and Experience*, 3.

⁹⁸ Risse, *Mending Bodies, Saving Souls*, 680.

⁹⁹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 307.

Taylor's articulation of feeling cross-pressured reveals a necessary relationship between immanence and transcendence as two dialogical pairs that necessarily interact for the purpose of generating new possibilities of meaning.¹⁰⁰ As Michael J. Buckley's analysis of atheism in relation to theism shows, immanence and transcendence are here not simply an accidental conjunction or a successive accumulation of contradictory opinions; there is a bond of necessity that stretches between them.¹⁰¹ Immanence depends on transcendence for its meaning, for its vocabulary, and for the reality it rejects. We can only conceptualize the immanent in contrast to a transcendent. The tension between these dichotomous pairs is not a problem seeking resolution, but rather, as I argued earlier, the source of our ability to perceive the world. In the immanent we are able to observe material realities, but the human experience extends beyond just the material: experiences of justice, beauty, and love are all examples of 'true', immaterial realities. In the hospital context, if material explanations were all-sufficient, chaplaincy would presumably have died out. The continued need for spiritual care implies an element of the human experience that relates to an immaterial, transcendent as part of our lifeworld. We don't need to conclude that such grasping refers to the existence of a supernatural deity, but rather simply a human motivation for determining meaning beyond the merely empirically explicable.

Taylor's thesis challenges the *obviousness* of secularism and the status quo that underwrites the naïve naturalism dominant in contemporary philosophy:

What this view reads out of the picture is the possibility that Western modernity might be powered by its own positive version of the good, that is, by one constellation of such visions among available others, rather than by the only viable set left after the old myths and legends have been exploded.¹⁰²

Secularity₃ is not a distilled state, it is an expanding context of fragmentation, pluralization, and fragilization in which an increasing number of visions for living of good life and ideas of human

¹⁰⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 598.

¹⁰¹ Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (United States: Yale University Press, 1987), 15.

¹⁰² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 571.

flourishing are possible. This ‘nova effect’ “produces not just a binary choice between two options but an array of options that almost metastasize because of the multiple cross-pressures of this pluralized situation.”¹⁰³ Presenting ‘religion’ in mutually exclusive terms with ‘secularism’ misses the complex interconnectedness that arises based on this necessary and ongoing cross-pressure. It is the point of convergence, the cross-pressure, that produces the nova effect because it is a space from which incompatible signs converge to create new possibilities of meaning.¹⁰⁴ The phenomenological nature of religion in secular society, as seen in the example of humanist chaplaincy, offers a window to explore this convergence. Taylor concludes that “life in a secular age [...] is uneasy and cross-pressured, and doesn’t lend itself easily into a comfortable resting place.”¹⁰⁵ Perhaps our goal within post-modernity is to build metaphors that find comfort in the dynamisms.

Limits to *A Secular Age*

Taylor’s articulation of secularity₃ is both convincing and helpful when examining the nature of religion in our present context. Despite the detail and complexity that Taylor brings to his analysis, it is a striking fact that Taylor does not address the colonial histories that fundamentally impacted the process by which Latin Christendom became secular.¹⁰⁶ Taylor anticipates this criticism in his introduction by stating the focus of his project is on the West, as a civilization whose roots lie in what used to be called ‘Latin Christendom’.¹⁰⁷ It is understandable

¹⁰³ Smith, *How (not) to be Secular*, 62-3.

¹⁰⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 374.

¹⁰⁵ Taylor, 676.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig J. Calhoun, introduction in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010), 27.

¹⁰⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 21.

that Taylor delineation will exclude certain elements of the past five-hundred years. However, “any comprehensive narrative of the modern civilizing process must also take into account the Western European encounter with other civilizations.”¹⁰⁸ It is simply inadequate to ignore this fundamental element of history when considering secularism.

To begin with, the very concept of ‘religion’ emerged from frequent encounters with unfamiliar cultures through colonial expansion which induced a practice of self-reflection that enabled ethnographers to conceptualize the possible boundaries of religious phenomena.¹⁰⁹ Prior to Christian imperialism, Latin Christendom did not conceptualize ‘religion’ as a defined category but rather experienced it as part of an unquestioned orientation to living in the world that bundled politics, economics, and social class.¹¹⁰ Contact with ‘non-Latinate’ partners impacted how Christianity understood itself, which inevitably impacted central ideas and institutions within Latin Christendom. In ‘Can Secularism be Other-Wise’, Sara Mahmood points out that Christian missionary work abroad “played a crucial role in shaping and redefining modern Christianity to fit the requirements of an emergent liberal social and political order in Europe.”¹¹¹ Given the expansion of Christian missionary work around the world, key political and religious figures in Europe were forced to contend with theological issues as they sought to bring the gospel to those living in ignorance of Christ’s truth. Mahmood notes, “the imperative to educate all of ‘Christ’s children,’ had far reaching effects on the shape secular education took within Europe.”¹¹² For example, conflict between evangelicals and utilitarians in nineteenth-

¹⁰⁸ Casanova, “A Secular Age: Dawn or Twilight?” 278.

¹⁰⁹ Richard King, “The Copernican Turn in the Study of Religion” in *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies*, ed. Richard King (New York: Columbia University Press: 2017), 11.

¹¹⁰ King, 11.

¹¹¹ Saba Mahmood, “Can Secularism Be Other-wise?” in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age*, ed. Warner, Michael, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig J. Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010), 287.

¹¹² Mahmood, 287.

century colonial India were resolved by banning the Bible from Indian schools, to be replaced with English literature. This policy was eventually adopted in British schools, setting a standard for secular education in the public school system. Her point is that Latin Christendom exists through its engagement with ‘non-Latinate’ partners; a failure to acknowledge this perpetuates a view of Latin Christendom’s secularity as unique and superior to other forms of civilization.¹¹³

Discussing the rise of secularism in Latin Christendom without acknowledging its colonial history consolidates its epistemic and historical privilege as an exceptional achievement in human history. Christianity’s claim to civilizational superiority has been “secured through a long history of global power and concomitant patterns of analytical thought,”¹¹⁴ which Taylor does little to confront. In fact, Mahmood argues that his exclusion of this point perpetuates certain colonial tendencies and ultimately “misidentifies the very object of which he speaks.”¹¹⁵ The story of secularity that Taylor tells speaks of the buffered self as an essential shift in the social imaginary, but does not mention how this new sense of self very significantly introduced a sense of superiority and uniqueness among Western European Christians that justified the occupation of lands, racial subjugation, and enslavement.¹¹⁶ While Taylor acknowledges the limitations to his historical account, Mahmood’s point is not a pedantic detail, but rather reveals a fundamental element of Latin Christendom’s move to secularity³.

This chapter has problematized anachronistic readings that assume modernity to be an inevitability rather than a constructed reality. Taylor’s view of secularity confronts subtraction stories by highlighting the many forms of belief that are currently available. Secularity is

¹¹³ Mahmood, 292.

¹¹⁴ Mahmood, 292.

¹¹⁵ Mahmood, 289.

¹¹⁶ Vanessa Machado de Oliveira, *Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity’s Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2021), 142.

therefore not defined by its lack of belief but by its multiplicity of beliefs brought into being through a series of reforms that unintentionally shifted epistemic conditions to make possible alternative forms of belief. Humanism is not necessarily the next evolutionary step in religion, but rather engaged in an ongoing dialogue. Following Taylor, I develop this argument through a historical narrative that illuminate the shifts that allowed for humanism to be a live option. The medieval episteme is marked by a sense of porosity and social bonds, evidenced in early hospital institutions that were ordered around artifacts of faith and intercessional prayers. The Reformation's increased value of cognitive discernment resulted in a sense of the individual being buffered from external reality. As individuals took on greater autonomy over their spiritual practices, the ecclesial structures were forced to reconceptualize where and how individuals could express religiosity. It was no longer only the monks and nuns – now ordinary citizens could conduct their daily tasks with a sense of reverence. This infused mundane reality with a sense of sacredness, which, in hindsight, was the beginning of cutting transcendence off from the quotidian. Modernity, then, is marked by a sense of individuality, purification, and the marginalization of the divine. But we are not fully content in this new context. A malaise has crept in from the cross-pressure where we wonder, is this all that there is? While there are legitimate limitations to Taylor's presentation of the current secular age, his articulation of the 'unthought' is, I suggest, convincing. Taylor's description of the expanding nova of beliefs is a direct result of the infinite number of possibilities that are available as individuals meander between immanence and transcendence, even while denying the presence of a transcendent. The cross-pressure is evident in the biomedical model prevalent in modern hospital institutions. Despite the increasing technological advancements in medicine, there remains a lurking desire for support to address existential needs that rest beyond material biology. The nature and role of

chaplaincy, positioned between these dichotomous realms, shows the fecundity of this dissonance.

Chapter Three

The ecological model

In chapter two, I traced the changing nature and role of chaplains in the healthcare context alongside a shifting social imaginary giving rise to developing ‘secularism’. The medieval hospital, ordered around the chapel, routines of prayers, and sacraments, was recast following the Reformation as a civic space used to enforce values of obedience, productivity, and personal piety. This paralleled the growing individualism of the late medieval to modern periods. In the current hospital setting, patients appear pressured between the immediate advantages of biomedical technologies and the urge to find meaning in illness through ‘spiritual’ means. As I have shown, the modernist imaginary, intent on resolving this cross-pressure, ignores pluralized and fragmented realities (the ‘proliferation of hybrids’, as Latour would say¹) and is therefore insufficient to describe the complex and expanding options of belief that are available. In this chapter I explore in greater detail the fraught position of the hospital chaplain at the intersection between “the historic presence of the Church in public spaces; secularization; contemporary spiritual expression, and close engagement with the life-changing effects of illness.”² I suggest that the discursive locus of the chaplain at the confluence between these domains forces a reimagining of the relationship between ‘religion’, ‘secularism’, ‘immanence’ and ‘transcendence’ providing greater insight into the current transformations of religion.

While a growing number of people have disassociated from traditional religion, this does not equate to a full-scale adoption of materialism. If a reductionist, naturalistic explanation of the human experience were sufficient, presumably the phenomenon of chaplaincy would have died out. However, the benefits of spiritual care are recognized by both patients and health care

¹ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 11

² Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century*, 7.

providers, thus challenging a purely naturalist conception of reality. Recent research supports the ongoing need for spiritual care. In a qualitative study published in 2015, spiritual issues were identified by patients and healthcare providers as an essential component of care.³ Another study found of the 243 patients interviewed, 69.1% reported at least one spiritual need and 32% reported high spiritual needs.⁴ In the same study, 52.9% of participants indicated a spiritual need for finding hope, 50.2% for meaning making, and 42.7% for confronting death.⁵ Offering a dedicated professional to address these needs in turn impacted the overall efficacy of acute interventions by ameliorating patient distress and improving the wellbeing of healthcare providers in the process.⁶ These reports indicate both a prevalent expression of spiritual needs and a recognition that spiritual care is an essential part of overall patient care. This is *prima facie* evidence for the conceptual channels between immanence and transcendence.

In hospital settings, the persistence of these extra-mundane experiences among patients, regardless of their religious orientation (including the orientation to ‘none’, that is, no religious adherence), is addressed by practices of ‘spiritual care’ which promotes the construction of a meaningful life story amidst fragmenting experiences brought about by illness.⁷ As a key figure in the provision of this care, chaplains occupy a unique position within the hospital as they negotiate the dominant evidence-based language of biomedicine and their own transcendent or ‘spiritual’ practices.⁸ Given the continued demand for spiritual care and its apparent effectiveness, a purely biomedical approach to medical care appears insufficient in supporting

³ Sinclair, et. al., 10.1136/bmjopen-2015-009392.

⁴ Sara N. Davison and Gian S. Jhangri, “Existential and Supportive Care Needs Among Patients with Chronic Kidney Disease,” *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* 40, no. 6 (2010): 840, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2010.03.015>.

⁵ Davison and Jhangri, “Existential and Supportive Care Needs Among Patients with Chronic Kidney Disease,” 840.

⁶ Sinclair, et. al., 10.1136/bmjopen-2015-009392.

⁷ Pesut, et. al., “Hospitable Hospitals in a Diverse Society: From Chaplains to Spiritual Care Providers,” 833.

⁸ Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century*, 142.

the holistic health and wellbeing of the patient. But the question remains: how in our increasingly pluralized and fragmented secular age do we manage the tensions between these disparate domains, whether this is a tension between ‘immanence and transcendence’ or ‘religious and secular’? As discussed earlier, medieval societies used rituals like Carnival; modernity pursues purification. But Taylor reminds us there is no going back in time, and Latour convincingly argues that purification was never possible. The way forward then requires a new imaginary that enables complexities to coexist whereby disparate knowledge systems can interact without being subsumed.

I rely on Isabelle Stengers’ metaphor of ecology to help imagine this way forward.⁹ The example of humanist chaplaincy within the health care context will be used as a locus to explore how this system might work, before applying it more broadly to a phenomenological discussion of ‘religion’ and its many *others*. As Taylor has shown, ‘secularism’ and ‘humanism’ are not characterized by an absence of belief, rather they consist of a new set of beliefs that are possible given certain epistemic conditions. From this perspective, the category of ‘religion’ becomes significantly more complex as it can now include beliefs and values that superficially appear to be ‘nonreligious.’ This complexity is only an issue when viewing the relationship between these domains through the modernist lens of purity which would assume beliefs are *either* ‘religious’ *or* ‘nonreligious.’ Humanist chaplaincy problematizes the binary choice between ‘religious’ or ‘nonreligious’ as the very nature of the work reflects a fragmented and pluralized context that relies on a series of complex (and sometime competing) network. The chaplain navigates between religion, atheism, spirituality, materialism, immanence, and transcendence, thus challenging the simplistic reductions of these domains. Attempts to resolve such tensions

⁹ Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I*, 37.

inevitably falls short as these domains necessarily press against each other to produce an ecological system that can be understood only through the relations and distinctions between seemingly disparate domains. The goal of this chapter is to highlight the complex, often contradictory, dialogic pairs to reveal the inherent power of religion to negotiate between domains.

In her book, *Cosmopolitics I*, Isabelle Stengers challenges the modernist pursuit of a purified knowledge system by offering an alternative imaginary in the metaphor of ecology.¹⁰ Unlike the practice of gardening, ‘ecology’ calls forth an interdependent relation between how “practices are introduced and justified, the way they define their requirements and obligations, the way they are described, the way they attract interest, [and] the way they are accountable to others.”¹¹ The various positions that arise from these modes of intervention are added to the interconnected ways in which the various protagonists address one another.¹² This complex web requires: “abandonment of the opposition between ‘faithful description’ and ‘fiction,’ between ‘fact’ and ‘value,’ for an openly constructivist approach that affirms the possible, that actively resists the plausible and the probable targeted by approaches that claim to be neutral.”¹³ The ecological perspective offers the possibility to observe a set of ongoing interactions between relations by embedding each actor within a complex web, challenging a hierarchical order aimed at purification. This perspective invites us to consider the production of new values, new modes of evaluation, and new meanings that emerge at the intersection between these relations, allowing for a situational, contextual understanding in place of a single intelligible truth. I suggest that adopting this metaphor of ecology reconfigures the relationship between religion

¹⁰ Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I*, 37.

¹¹ Stengers, 56-57.

¹² Stengers, 57.

¹³ Stengers, 57.

and secularism, spirituality and biomedicine, and immanence and transcendence, by bringing into focus the multiplicity of relations that sustain, connect, and contradict these domains. The goal is not to distill a purified, empirical, true domain, but instead to encourage a practice which acknowledges their necessary and ongoing interaction.

The metaphor of ecology is meant to highlight an incoherence within the modern purity imaginary where scientists *produce* certain ‘facts’ while simultaneously asserting their autonomy.¹⁴ An ecological model does not seek to resolve this tension but instead offers an imaginary that holds contradictory positions simultaneously and allows for the “the consequences of the meanings we create, the judgement we produce and to which we assign the status of ‘fact’, concerning what is primary and what is secondary, [to] be addressed immediately, whether those consequences are intentional or unforeseen.”¹⁵ To demonstrate this, Stengers offers the example of the neutrino, which is both “as old as the period in which its existence was first demonstrated, that is produced, in our laboratories, [and] dates back to the origins of the universe.”¹⁶ It is both constructed *and* essential to all cosmological models. She chooses the neutrino because, while it has been known to exist given its presence in all weak nuclear interactions, its direct observation was not possible until an enormous number of instruments, interpretations, and references to other particles, along with advances in human, social, technical, mathematical, institutional, and cultural histories had occurred.¹⁷ Once the means were created and the neutrino was revealed, it was perceived as autonomous in relation to the detection devices that revealed its very existence. Stengers reminds us of the dense network

¹⁴ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 18. Latour is critical of the production of ‘facts’ which tend to stand in isolation, impervious to the cultural frameworks (past and present) that may stand in contradiction. Exploring this aspect of Latour’s argumentation is beyond the scope of this thesis.

¹⁵ Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I*, 34-35.

¹⁶ Stengers, 20-21.

¹⁷ Stengers, 21.

of human practices and their histories alongside the raw components of the physical, which *together* make the neutrino both dated and transhistoric.¹⁸ The paradoxical mode of the neutrino's existence – as it exists both 'for us' and 'in itself' – does not pose a philosophical dilemma seeking resolution, rather it highlights a correlatively produced reality whose triumph is measured by its ability to bring into existence a *factish* that holds an internal complexity.¹⁹ Stengers borrows the term '*factish*' from Latour, who uses it to describe beings which we fabricate, and which fabricate us.²⁰ Like the duality of nature and society, Latour dichotomizes fetishism and iconoclasm as, "the tendency, on the one hand, to see the things that we have made as having a life of their own and, on the other, to want to destroy what has been made in order to remain rational."²¹ Latour seeks passage between these dyads by cultivating notions of the 'factish' which allows suspension of belief in belief, and 'iconoclash' which allows the suspension of iconoclastic gestures. His goal is to disrupt scientific and/or religious belief in a fetishized truth, and the iconoclastic position of neutrality, by focusing on the means in which mediation takes place. The neutrino exemplifies the various (sometimes contradictory) realities that converge to constitute its existence. At the level of 'fact,' it becomes stale information, authenticated as something of which everyone 'should' be made aware.²² Because the neutrino does not play a significant role along the path of humanity's maturation, the average person can easily forget, "the avatars of its fabrication, and celebrate its existence 'in itself.'"²³ Stengers challenges this by asserting that if something is to be celebrated, it is not the neutrino itself but

¹⁸ Stengers, 22.

¹⁹ Stengers, 22.

²⁰ See Bruno Latour, *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

²¹ Turner, "On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods - About Bruno Latour, On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods," doi.10.1017/S0003975612000380.

²² Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I*, 26.

²³ Stengers, 26.

its participation and coproduction alongside community members.²⁴ Moving beyond ‘neutral facts’, Stengers wants to bring into awareness the network of relationships that sustain our practices and allow new modes of existence to burst forth. To truly understand the neutrino, one must be willing to engage with a vast set of questions beyond simply comprehending what it *is*. “Who is interested, how can one be interested, at what price, by what means and under what constraints”²⁵ are not secondary, subjective questions that detract from the overall pursuit of knowledge. “They are the ingredients of its identity, that is, the way in which it exists for others and the way in which it situates others.”²⁶

Through these questions, a new kind of awareness emerges that includes the interdependent narratives that simultaneously creates and sustains action. She discusses this theme using an analogy of the *pharmakon*, a drug that can act as a poison or remedy, “depending on the dose, the circumstances, or the context.”²⁷ The *pharmakon*, as a drug that offers no guarantees, challenges our desire for “a stable distinction between the beneficial medicament and the harmful drug, between rational pedagogy and suggestive influence, between reason and opinion.”²⁸ Similarly, ‘biomedicine’, which attempts to construct itself as an autonomous narrative, is nevertheless linked to the people, forces, and social realities which have constructed it. Stengers cautions that once certain facts of biomedicine move away from the network of labs, “where they achieve their existence, once they are taken up in statements that unbind existence, invention, and proof, they can change meaning and become the vectors of what might be called ‘scientific opinion’” that have a pharmacological instability.²⁹ The biomedical *pharmakon* can

²⁴ Stengers, 26.

²⁵ Stengers, 27.

²⁶ Stengers, 27.

²⁷ Stengers, 29.

²⁸ Stengers, 29.

²⁹ Stengers, 31.

mutate into a poison when its facts become isolated from the complex network of actors (both human and nonhuman) which sustain it. It then occupies a position of judgement that, “gives the ‘physical world’ the power to transcend all other realities.”³⁰ Such a position gives primacy to certain realities and simultaneously disqualifies practices and questions that appear contradictory, which becomes the foothold to justify injustices carried out in its name. Ecology allows a new perspective in which, “no action has an identity independent of the whole that stabilizes it but causes it.”³¹ The multiplicity and cyclical reality of the ecological perspective invites us to make meaning through a “symbiotic agreement” in which “every protagonist is interested in the success of the other for its own reasons.”³² The production of new meanings, new values, and new knowledge systems subvert consensus in a shared superior good and begin to integrate a reference to the other for their own benefit. Stengers calls this ‘reciprocal capture’ which is a dual process of identity construction, whereby each being has an interest but recognizes that if it is going to continue its existence it must see to the maintained existence of the other.³³

The advantage of the term ‘ecology’ is that it can be used in both scientific and social contexts, which underlines its interdisciplinary networking capacity.³⁴ In the scientific sense, ‘ecology’ is associated with concerns and research practices aimed at understanding the interdependence among populations, whatever they may be. In a social context, we can characterise our social practices “as an ecological situation, regardless of the ‘immanent mode of existence’ of each member or the nature of the contribution represented by the existence of other

³⁰ Stengers, 32.

³¹ Stengers, 35.

³² Stengers, 35.

³³ Stengers, 36.

³⁴ Stengers, 32.

members for them.”³⁵ The approach is not concerned with the individual practices of any specific member, but instead regards the ways in which members interact in broad terms. Essential to understanding ecology is recognizing that values, modes of evaluation, and meanings do not constitute an ultimate intelligible truth or an external reference source.³⁶ Instead, the inevitable and ongoing production of new values and meanings are added to a context “already produced by a multiplicity of relations.”³⁷ This model is then useful for my analysis of religion and its *others* as it allows for the various domains to be seen in mutual collaboration; interacting and negotiating across a network of plurality, fragmentation, and fragilization. The implications of this idealized ecological model will be discussed as part of my conclusion.

Hospitals, spiritual care, and biomedicine

Examining chaplaincy’s interaction with biomedicine in hospital settings elucidates key elements of the ecological model described by Stengers. Importantly, holding a comprehensive, transactional view of chaplaincy’s unique position brings into focus certain judgements about what knowledge systems are considered primary and secondary. This is evidenced by the ongoing debate among chaplains regarding the legitimacy of their practice within healthcare settings which tend to prioritize certain biomedical and evidence-based narratives over less empirical discourses. Some chaplains argue their practice can be effectively translated into the evidence-based language,³⁸ while others assert chaplaincy is a unique knowledge system that

³⁵ Stengers, 32.

³⁶ Stengers, 33.

³⁷ Stengers, 33.

³⁸ Simon J Craddock Lee, “In a Secular Spirit: Strategies of Clinical Pastoral Education,” *Health Care Analysis* 10, no. 4 (2002): 339–356; Thomas St. James O’Connor, “The Search for Truth: The Case for Evidence Based Chaplaincy,” *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 13, no. 1 (2002): 185–194.

holds its own visions of the good.³⁹ While certain practices of chaplaincy may benefit from standardization, I argue that a wholesale translation into the evidence-based/biomedical discourse perpetuates a purity mindset that gives primacy to the objective observation of the natural world as if it is both possible and inevitable. Following Taylor's critique of secularity², biomedicine is its own set of practices, values, and beliefs that should not be assumed as obvious, neutral, or given. Rather than seeking to reduce or resolve chaplaincy's interaction with evidence-based/biomedical narratives, I suggest an ecological perspective that allows for medical care and spiritual care to co-exist as distinct, overlapping systems of knowledge, so that biomedicine is not reduced to an ersatz-spiritual practice and chaplaincy is not reduced to an ersatz-medical practice.

Chaplaincy, in general, has not developed a large body of evidence-based research studies, and has therefore not established itself fully as an academically recognized program.⁴⁰ In a 2001 article, Laurel Burton and Larry VandeCreek asked how chaplains discuss their profession and how these discussions were acknowledged by the medical community. They concluded that, "[chaplaincy] received minuscule attention. Within these 60 articles, the authors referred to chaplains, pastoral care departments, or used other obvious synonyms for professional chaplaincy only twice."⁴¹ They provide four explanations for chaplaincy's limited recognition: (1) the historical conflict between religion and science continues to impact spiritual care's legitimacy in the science dominated medical system; (2) the traditional chaplains associated with a specific denomination, often acting as clergy members, are considered out of date and have

³⁹ John Swinton, *Dementia: Living in The Memories of God* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: 2012), 66.

⁴⁰ Burton and VandeCreek, "Professional Chaplaincy: Its Role and Importance in Healthcare," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 55, no. 1 (2001): 429.

⁴¹ Burton and VandeCreek, 420.

been replaced with ‘new priests’; (3) chaplains have been excluded from conversations regarding professional care for individuals experiencing crisis; (4) data and research documenting the benefits of spiritual care cannot compete with the extensive research empirically showing the success of biomedical intervention.⁴² Chaplains appear to be caught between the transcendent ‘spiritual’ reference of their practice and the pressure to produce observable outcomes that demonstrate the validity of their role. This is both an existential question facing chaplains as well as a practical one that impacts their access to funding. If chaplaincy is not health care, why fund it, and if it is health care, it ought to be able to produce evidence-based results.⁴³

To address such practical issues, some chaplains have encouraged the implementation of screening tools to empirically measure spiritual needs. The Inpatient Spiritual Care Implementation Model [ISCIM] and the Faith, Importance, Community, Address [FICA] Spiritual History Tool were proposed as methods to integrate “spiritual history and ongoing spirituality-related discussions, as well as assessment of spiritual distress into routine care and treatment planning by [interprofessional] team.”⁴⁴ The questions are designed so any member of the health care team can assess faith, belief, meaning, and spirituality to better inform medical decisions. Accompanying initial survey questions are interview questions intended to encourage conversations between patient and health care professionals around spiritual beliefs and concerns related to their illness, without the direct support of a chaplain.⁴⁵ Some value these assessments as “increasingly important activities in contemporary healthcare practice” because they quantify ‘spiritual needs’ in a language that is comprehensible to health care professionals.⁴⁶

⁴² Burton and VandeCreek, “Professional Chaplaincy: Its Role and Importance in Healthcare,” 422-427.

⁴³ Swift, *Hospital Chaplaincy in the Twenty-First Century*, 69.

⁴⁴ Suzette Brémault-Phillips, et. al., “Integrating Spirituality as a Key Component of Patient Care,” *Religions (Basel, Switzerland)* 6, no. 2 (2015): 478.

⁴⁵ Brémault-Phillips, et al., 486.

⁴⁶ Brémault-Phillips, et al., 478.

Standardized training programs, such as Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), are another avenue sought to legitimize spiritual care as “an effective and worthwhile patient care strategy for this era.”⁴⁷ This training also seeks to establish universal relevance among patients and to distinguish spiritual care from other psychological interventions.⁴⁸ To achieve this, the professionalization of CPE recognizes a necessary “secularization driven by the closer collaboration with biomedical rationales.”⁴⁹ The ‘secularization’ is described as a process of constructing the language and discourse of chaplaincy in general ‘spiritual’ terms rather than those affiliated with a particular denomination.⁵⁰ By avoiding the practices, narratives, and theologies of particular faith traditions, chaplains hope to show contemporary relevance by using the ‘neutral’ and ‘value-free’ language of ‘the secular’. As part of their self-preservation, chaplains recognize the need to legitimize their role as members of the health care team, craft a role for themselves individually, effectively communicate their role to the health care providers, and justify their role to health care administrators.⁵¹ The professional designation provided by CPE is positioned to satisfy these needs by offering a recognizable, universally relevant skillset.

In ‘The Search for Truth: The Case for Evidence Based Chaplaincy,’ Thomas St. James O’Connor argues that existing within a culture dominated by evidence-based narratives requires chaplaincy to become familiar with this language and to adopt its speech.⁵² O’Connor argues that the fear of moving towards a scientific, evidence-based approach, because it might dislodge the religious traditions and role of faith, is unfounded: “chaplaincy and science are not opposed [...]

⁴⁷ Lee, “In a Secular Spirit: Strategies of Clinical Pastoral Education,” 349.

⁴⁸ Lee, 346.

⁴⁹ Lee, 353; The use of the word ‘spiritual’ here is contentious. While secular spaces seem to prefer its less offensive affiliation, what ‘spirituality’ means and the implied value of ‘spiritual but not religious’ is not well defined throughout the literature on ‘spiritual care’.

⁵⁰ Lee, 353.

⁵¹ Pesut, et. al., “Hospitable Hospitals in a Diverse Society: From Chaplains to Spiritual Care Providers,” 829.

⁵² O’Connor, “The Search for Truth: The Case for Evidence Based Chaplaincy,” 185–194.

Both seek the truth and seek to understand and explain the origins of the universe. Both are concerned with physical, mental and emotional health.”⁵³ Removing the essentialist boundaries between chaplaincy and science, O’Connor claims, may demonstrate that most faith traditions already ground their conceptions of truth and understanding on some evidence.⁵⁴ This is seen in a congregation’s discernment of an individual’s call to ministry. The call to ministry, he says, “is not just an internal, mystical awareness. [...] It is also evidenced in the life of the person and the work he/she does.”⁵⁵ Judgement is evidenced by psychological tests, seminary reports, academic grades, letters of reference, and other various forms of documentation that faith groups can utilize to evaluate a candidate. These are evidence-based tools that chaplains and faith communities already employ. O’Connor concludes, “the key to the position of chaplaincy is not necessarily solid evidence that shows our work but that those in administration value the role of chaplaincy.”⁵⁶ In his view, chaplaincy ought to consider adopting the dominate narrative so it can be recognized by hospital administration in its own terms.

Standardized assessments, CPE training, and evidence-based language seeking to quantify the benefits of chaplaincy are relatively recent developments, partly because there was a historical hesitancy to position the legitimacy of the discipline in scientific terms over and above theological ones.⁵⁷ Traditionally ordained chaplains received their sense of legitimacy (and responsibility) from God which in turn validated their power and authority in the provision of pastoral care, “in a way that no other discipline in a medical institution [could] provide.”⁵⁸ In the contemporary secular hospital institution, traditionally ordained chaplains, previously guided by

⁵³ O’Connor, 187-188.

⁵⁴ O’Connor, 187.

⁵⁵ O’Connor, 190.

⁵⁶ O’Connor, 192.

⁵⁷ Pesut, et. al., “Hospitable Hospitals in a Diverse Society: From Chaplains to Spiritual Care Providers,” 826.

⁵⁸ Stephen R. Harding, et. al., “Spiritual Care, Pastoral Care, and Chaplains: Trends in the Health Care Literature,” *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 14, no. 2 (2008): 114.

connecting to a shared faith tradition, have been forced to reconsider their practice of pastoral care given the rising number of atheist, agnostic, and humanist patients who continue to request some form of spiritual care.⁵⁹ The shift from ‘pastoral care’ to ‘spiritual care’ made space for the emerging practice of humanist chaplaincy, as it supported the primacy of the immanent, material, biomedical ‘facts’ of reality, aligned with the dominate biomedical narrative.⁶⁰ Spiritual care offered a more generalized version of pastoral care, “rendered less threatening and more universal by the label spiritual,”⁶¹ so it could serve a more diverse patient population by allowing the individual’s spiritual quest to take precedence over the norms of a particular faith tradition.⁶² In this respect, ‘spiritual care’ works to construct a convincing narrative of contemporary relevance whereby modern religiosity remains – though under a less threatening label and with demonstratable outcomes.

Not all chaplains are convinced that simply adopting the dominant taxonomy will result in health care providers and hospital administration accepting the role of chaplaincy en-mass. Laurel Burton and Larry VandeCreek argue that a fundamental reason why research into spirituality will not ultimately benefit chaplains lies in the politics of health care.⁶³ They imagine a situation in which evidence-based research successfully demonstrates the importance of spiritual care, resulting in a broad-scale support, but worry that this “will not result in an increased role for professional chaplains because interdisciplinary professionals will see opportunity for advancement and new explorations as demonstrated in nursing literature.”⁶⁴ Once spiritual care can be effectively distilled to an assessment tool with clear and direct results, health

⁵⁹ Lee, “In a Secular Spirit: Strategies of Clinical Pastoral Education,” 348.

⁶⁰ Lee, 348.

⁶¹ Lee, 353.

⁶² Harding, et. al., “Spiritual Care, Pastoral Care, and Chaplains: Trends in the Health Care Literature,” 115.

⁶³ Burton and VandeCreek, “Professional Chaplaincy: Its Role and Importance in Healthcare,” 431.

⁶⁴ Burton and VandeCreek, 431.

care providers are likely to take over this type of care as one of their own professional prerogatives. The justification for this will be: “if spiritual care is good for the patient (or even if it is popular with the patient and only marginally beneficial), then why let someone else like a chaplain do it and claim the rewards? These are classic market-driven, competitive dynamics in which big fish eat little fish that cannot protect themselves.”⁶⁵ Burton and VandeCreek thus doubt that quantifying the health care benefits of chaplaincy will result in the professional involvement of chaplains.

John Swinton further questions chaplaincy’s self-translation into the biomedical model by suggesting that theology might offer its own unique vision of well-being that cannot easily be translated into evidence-based language. Subsuming spiritual care into the biomedical model might seem reasonable given that ‘spiritual care’ is shown to enhance the overall well-being of people with illness. However, Swinton argues:

What is rarely considered is the fact that the goals of medicine and theology and their respective definitions of health and well-being may be significantly different. Grafting theology into the goals of medicine simply on the ground of potential therapeutic benefit will inevitably lead to confusion, dissonance, distortion, and contradiction.⁶⁶

Theology, whether specifically religious or more broadly spiritual, strives towards deeper existential questions pertaining to the meaning of life, suffering, and illness, that recognizes the importance of human interconnectivity and the call to transcend the immediacy of self.⁶⁷

Interventions at this level might include practices such as developing meaningful personal relationships, meditation, access to the sacred, rituals, etc., which tend not to be determined by a care plan or quantified assessment tools.⁶⁸ It is possible that a vision of well-being in the

⁶⁵ Burton and VandeCreek, “Professional Chaplaincy: Its Role and Importance in Healthcare,” 431.

⁶⁶ Swinton, *Dementia: Living in The Memories of God*, 7.

⁶⁷ Swinton, 131.

⁶⁸ Martin Neal Walton, “Assessing the Construction of Spirituality: Conceptualizing Spirituality in Health Care Settings,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 66, no. 3 (2012): 1–16.

theological/spiritual register might not align with certain biomedical assessments as the two present disparate interpretations of experience.

Thus in the hospital setting, chaplains inhabit a contradictory position. They are called toward ‘immanentization’ by standardized tools and training, while simultaneously being pressured by a lingering sense that their practice accounts for something beyond what is immediately observable. It is important to remember that the cross-pressure Taylor defines, “doesn’t mean that all or even most people in this culture feel torn, but rather that virtually all positions held are drawn to define themselves at least partly in relation to these extremes.”⁶⁹ The experience of being cross-pressured does not mean chaplains must choose between either evidence-based language or traditional faith practices; it means that constructing their identity will require a meandering between these crucial reference points in a practice of bricolage.⁷⁰ The phenomenon of humanist chaplaincy did not emerge in opposition to traditional practices of pastoral care, nor did it seek to oppose rising biomedical technologies.⁷¹ Rather, as I have attempted to show throughout, humanism, and its practical application in chaplaincy, exists precisely *because* of the tension, or cross-pressure, between these domains as a baroque expression of the reductionist ontology of secularity² and the longing for something outside of ourselves. In this sense, it is reliant on both ‘secular’ domains and ‘religious’ ones. As soon as one domain is ‘purified’ from the other, we lose its potential creativity and efficacy. Expanding the context brings into focus a mutually constitutive network extending between a multiplicity of domains, challenging a hierarchical model that gives primacy to one particular (and arbitrary) domain.

⁶⁹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 676.

⁷⁰ Taylor, 514. A bricolage evokes a sense of the mosaic produced by the plurality endemic to this secular age.

⁷¹ Schuhmann, “Humanist Chaplaincy According to Northwestern European Humanist Chaplains: Towards a Framework for Understanding Chaplaincy in Secular Societies.” 210.

Such an ecological perspective makes visible the multiplicities sustaining ‘chaplaincy,’ ‘humanism,’ and ‘biomedicine’ by bringing into focus the many complexities and relationships surrounding these signs. I have shown that ‘chaplaincy’ cannot be reduced to a single, unified signifier because it is dependent on traditional practices of pastoral care; evolving practices of spiritual care that acknowledge the reality of secularity³; shifting religious affiliation (including the affiliation to ‘none’); secularized hospital institutions; and evidence-based/biomedical narratives. Similarly, ‘humanism’ is a hybrid informed by the work of Jaap van Praag, Greg Epstein, Gretta Vosper, John Dietrich, and others who articulate this worldview in both their writing and life experiences. Like the neutrino, the phenomenon of humanist chaplaincy is a fragilized domain. Its meaning does not rest at the level of the signified. Instead, such realities must be defined in reference to the many realities, people, and values that co-create and sustain its existence. Doing so brings forth an image of humanist chaplaincy as both an emergent practice of religiosity *and* a historically constructed phenomenon. Holding this complex ecology up to the complex ecology surrounding biomedicine, problematizes any attempt to neatly subsume one into the other. I argue that we must see these complex ecologies ‘in stereo’, avoiding a mono-view. This will also allow us to question the primacy of evidence-based language to uncover the intentional or unforeseen consequences of “who is interested, how one can be interested, at what price, by what means and under what constraints.”⁷²

Stengers ecological model brings into focus the multiple realities, people, and values sustaining ‘humanism’, ‘chaplaincy’ and ‘biomedicine’. Attempts to prioritize a particular domain as a single intelligible truth become suspect as the complex relationship between domains comes into greater focus. As shown previously, the formation of humanism and

⁷² Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I*, 27.

humanist chaplaincy did not develop along a neutral, obvious, linear trajectory towards a more ‘rational’ terminus. How it came to be, who it was shaped by, and the price we have paid for it are all essential components of a larger network through which we must understand ‘humanist chaplaincy’. Analogously, ‘religion’ is best understood by attending to the pluralized, fragmented, dynamic, and fragile network constituting and sustaining it. From this perspective, ‘religion’ is not a reified reality opposing antonymous definitions of ‘the secular.’ Both are produced by a multiplicity of relations. The broader phenomenological nature and role of religion in secular society, as seen in the example of humanist chaplaincy within hospital institutions, challenges the modern imaginary of purification and calls forward a possibility for thinking otherwise. Placing ‘religion’ and ‘secularism’ in ecological terms transforms the previously hierarchical binary into a symbiotic network enriched by multiplicities, contradictions, and connections.

Ecology as metaphor

Ecology presents a rich metaphor to imagine how disparate (perhaps contradictory) domains engage to produce new values and meaning which are then added to a context already lush with a multiplicity of relations. Stengers willingness to bring conflicting signs, realities, and systems into contact does not appear to be a forced compromise but is rather a moment of metaphoric expression. In *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* Paul Ricoeur interprets metaphor as the semantic generator of a text.⁷³ He defines metaphor as, “an instantaneous creation, a semantic innovation which has no status in already established language and which only exists because of the attribution of an unusual or unexpected

⁷³ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: TCU Press, 1976), 52.

predicate.”⁷⁴ The attribution of an unusual or unexpected predicate is the interaction of two signs that would otherwise not be associated with each other. Occasioning two apparently contradictory signs to be understood together is what stretches their individual significations beyond their customary use. It is not simply about clothing an idea in an image, but instead about creating connections between ideas that were previously seen as incompatible. A live metaphor offers this spontaneously. This is the instantaneous creation, which has no previous status in our consciousness. This rupture brings forth new understandings of experience, the world, and our role within it. Ricoeur summarizes: “a metaphor, in short, tells us something new about reality.”⁷⁵ With the ecological model, humanist chaplaincy within secularized hospital settings acts as a metaphoric expression, a semantic generator that tells us something new about our present reality.

What counts as ‘religion’ cannot be distilled to a single sign or word – it must be understood in the context of its relationship to modernity, secularism, immanence, transcendence, the sacred, and the *saecular*. The view of religion implicit in the ecological model, exemplified in humanist chaplaincy, renders religion as that which produces new possibilities, new innovations, and new ways of being: a redescription engine. Religion, then, is not only doctrinal speculation, rituals and social practice, collections of ethnographic descriptions, or critical discourses concerning religion, but also includes a socially performed reality as it creatively frames one’s own life as a spiritual/existential project.⁷⁶ It becomes a ‘transformational perspective’ that reconfigures an orientation to immanence and transcendence,

⁷⁴ Ricoeur, 52.

⁷⁵ Ricoeur, 53.

⁷⁶ Don Cupitt, *The Sea of Faith* 2nd ed. (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1984), 278.

but also between itself and its many *others*, as dynamic and dependent relations in a vast ecological system.

This chapter has shown ‘ecology’ to be both a useful model for understanding the phenomenological nature of religion in secular society, as well as a useful metaphor to imagine the possibility for new ways of being. The model of ecology proposed by Stengers focuses on the multiplicity that sustains, connects, and contradicts relations between domains. This can be seen in examples ‘religion and secularism’, ‘spirituality and biomedicine’ and ‘immanence and transcendence’ as signs that require their opposing dyad for mutual constitution. In this sense, distilling neutral facts is problematic as these facts always arise from the relations that sustain them. Stengers calls us to take stock of these relationships, to question their methods, purpose, and values. These are not secondary questions to the scientific process of inquiry, they are essential. When considering the phenomena of chaplaincy within hospital settings, it is impossible to ignore the systems of power that ascribe value to certain narratives and not to others. The hospital institution, dominated by biomedical narratives, places the narrative of spiritual care in a subordinate position. Chaplains must then negotiate their legitimacy either by adopting the dominate evidence-based narrative of biomedicine, or by claiming legitimacy from certain traditional lineages that might include pastoral ordination. Recent suggestions to standardize assessment tools and training using dominate evidence-based language may function to secure a sense of professionalism, however it may also degrade the unique purpose and goals of spiritual care. What Taylor and Stengers help show, I argue, is that chaplains do not necessarily have to choose between the binary options. The experience of the cross-pressure is not either/or. The plurality of secularity³ is produced by the inevitable meandering between poles. So, ‘chaplaincy’, like ‘religion’ and ‘biomedicine’, is constituted as a fragilized domain,

dependent on various actors and realities, but, like metaphor, benefitting by the consequent power of semantic innovation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I pose a final question; in this secular age of plurality, fragilization, and fragmentation, how can multiple, often contradictory truths exist simultaneously? The ideal of an ecological model in which diversity flourishes suits a poetic aesthetic, one that sees ecosystems as assemblages just as we, “bodies with more microbial cells than human cells, are also assemblages. A happening. A polyphony of different, sometimes intertwining, sometimes dissonant, songs.”¹ The narrative of diversity generates possibilities in which difference is no longer a problem seeking resolution but rather a full expression of life – a song made whole by its dissonance. Throughout this thesis I have argued for a metaphysics that moves beyond a binary model, one that can effectively describe the fractured realities of ‘religion’, ‘secularity’, ‘biomedicine’, ‘spiritual care’, ‘immanence’ and ‘transcendence’ in terms of their co-relation and co-production. What results, for better or worse, is a plurality of truths that find legitimacy based on the contexts in which they exist. ‘Truth’ is no longer located in any one specific domain but is instead constituted by the relationships, subjective experiences, and contexts in which it functions. This challenges a modernist model of purification and more aptly describes the *feeling* of living in this secular age.

I have shown how the modernist imaginary, absorbed in a project that seeks to purify ‘nature’ from ‘culture’, ignores the proliferation of hybrids that are conceived as these two domains inevitably interact. Like metaphors, the combination of disparate signs (such as ‘nature’ and ‘culture’) spontaneously generates new realities – new hybrids – that act in the world. This mimics the cross-pressure described by Taylor, which produces an expanding option of beliefs caused by a constant meandering between the drive towards immanence and a latent desire for

¹ Sophie Strand, *The Flowering Wand: Rewilding the Sacred Masculine* (Vermont: Inner Traditions), 97.

transcendence. In this thesis, ‘religion and secularity’, ‘biomedicine and spiritual care’, and ‘immanence and transcendence’ have been shown to function as disparate signs that inevitably interact, producing new options, or metaphors, for belief and practice. The pluralized reality of this secular age presents a context that destabilizes clear definitions of ‘religion’ and its many *others* by showing the relationship of these signs to be complex and con-constitutive. Seen most evidently in the example of humanist chaplaincy in hospital settings, the domains of religion, secularity, biomedicine, spiritual care, immanence, transcendence, tradition, and modernity, intersect with such complexity that discussing one without reference to the others is impossible. The model of ecology offers a language that brings into focus the various relations sustaining and contradicting humanist chaplaincy. Imagined as an ecology, religion and its *others* interact like the forest as described by Suzanne Simard.² ‘Religion’ and ‘secularity’ are connected by a vast mycelium network that secures their mutual subsistence. To speak only of one misses the entire network grounding and sustaining its existence. Deconstructing such binaries and thus moving beyond them is not an act of collapsing ‘religion’ and ‘secularity’, since we maintain that each may hold a unique and distinct form. What changes is an understanding of how these domains relate to each other. Without going deeper into the question of relationality, the ecological model offers a scheme to observe the various (often disparate) entities that contribute to a picture of the whole. While this helps to generate new narratives for our social imagination, the ecological model does not appropriately address the political consequences of dissonant truth claims.

If the ecological model enables a movement beyond a binary metaphysics, then determining what is ‘true’ and/or ‘false’ becomes a significant challenge because “truths are not

² See Suzanne S. Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2022).

always solid and cumulative, they can be fragile and in need of constant maintenance.”³

Christian theology and Enlightenment rationality sought to define ‘truth’ based on its correspondence to either the Divine Will of God or the Intrinsic Nature of Reality, respectively. In either position, truth corresponds with a non-human external authority that lies outside of us.⁴ In Latour’s description of modernity, ‘nature’ was framed as this non-human external authority that we could access to reveal certain and fundamental ‘truths’ about the world. This same view is present within certain biomedical narratives. Conversely, ‘culture’ is seen as muddled by human mythology and therefore less true or ‘false’. If ‘nature’ can no longer be seen as a purified domain in contrast with ‘culture’, then simply equating ‘truth’ to the physical structures of ‘nature’ is impossible because it is constantly interacting with systems of culture through human senses that mediate access to ‘nature’.

Recognizing the fractured reality of any given domain, it is unclear what aspect of that domain would need to correspond with an external reality for it to be deemed ‘true’. Pragmatism, as presented by Richard Rorty in *Pragmatism as Anti-Authoritarianism*, deals with the issue that arises when truth no longer corresponds to a non-human authority. Rorty takes a position that holds “the need for choice between competing representations can be replaced by tolerance for a plurality of non-competing descriptions, descriptions which serve different purposes and which are evaluated by reference to their utility in fulfilling these purposes rather than by their ‘fit’ with the objects being described.”⁵ Rorty develops a view that moves away from a binary choice between what is ‘true’ (as it corresponds to nature/biology/immanence) or ‘false’ (as it is clouded

³ Stephen Muecke, “The Generous Philosopher,” Aeon. Accessed April 20, 2023. <https://aeon.co/essays/bruno-latour-showed-us-how-to-think-with-the-things-of-the-world>

⁴ Richard Rorty, *Pragmatism as Anti-Authoritarianism*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 2021), viii.

⁵ Rorty, 9.

by culture/religion/transcendence) to offer a context in which plurality can flourish by unhooking the reference to a non-human authority point and instead cultivating a description of the functional utility for different truths as they arise in different contexts. The primary concern then is for the richness and fecundity of our experience of phenomena, rather than its ‘fit’ with an external reality. Truths, as they manifest in beliefs, are seen as “habits of action rather than attempts to correspond to reality.”⁶

For pragmatists like Rorty, there is no object against which we can discern fundamental facts. Things that we can know are momentary, subjective, dependent, and contextual.⁷ The fluctuating nature of truth means that competing ideas can be simultaneously true depending on the subjective context surrounding it. Humanist chaplaincy in hospital settings exemplifies this through its interaction with biomedical narratives. As Swinton rightfully observes, the goals of spiritual care and the goals of medical care might drive at significantly different definitions of health and well-being.⁸ Chaplains themselves are caught between using the evidence-based language dominant in biomedical narratives, acknowledging that this narrative holds greater authority in health care spaces, and cultivating a practice of spiritual care that assesses, addresses, and supports a dissonant vision of flourishing. How can modern health care systems, like the publicly funded Alberta Health Services, provide both medical care and spiritual care to patients if they imply potentially contradictory forms of care? In a binary model that orders hierarchically, one is deemed primary and the other is deemed secondary. But in an ecological model, the contradiction between biomedical and spiritual care is complicated when tracing the vast network that ultimately connects and sustains these domains. Such a model may challenge

⁶ Rorty, 52.

⁷ Rorty, 88.

⁸ Swinton, *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God*, 66.

our ability to act decisively as it diminishes our certainty. Determining truth in a biomedical context versus a spiritual context can yield significantly different results which may have significant impact on public health measures, such as in the case with vaccination.

As in the case of healthcare, destabilizing truth can pose a legitimate threat to the overall functioning and wellbeing of society. In *The Ethics of Belief*, William K. Clifford argues that there is a moral responsibility for individuals to seek sufficient evidence for any form of belief, regardless of whether this belief is held internally or practiced politically.⁹ Clifford presents an example of a shipowner who, in preparing to send to sea an emigrant-ship, wondered if repairs were needed to secure the safety of the voyage. While doubts preyed upon the shipowner's mind, they ultimately concluded that the ship had made many successful voyages and it was unnecessary to assume this trip would be different. If the ship was to sink, we would say this shipowner was guilty because, even though they ultimately believed in the soundness of this ship, "he had no right to believe on such evidence as was before him."¹⁰ By refusing to collect sufficient evidence, their belief in the soundness of this ship was based on insufficient evidence and therefore unfounded. Alternatively, if the ship was to make the voyage safely, Clifford argues that the shipowner is still morally culpable because, "the question of right or wrong has to do with the origin of his belief, not the matter of it; not what is was, but how he got it; not whether it turned out to be true or false, but whether he had a right to believe on such evidence as was before him."¹¹ Beliefs built on insufficient evidence pose a significant threat to the order of society, according to Clifford, as beliefs are never a private matter which concern an individual

⁹ William K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," in *Philosophy of Religion: Toward A Global Perspective*, ed. Gary E. Kessler (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 1999), 445.

¹⁰ Clifford, 445.

¹¹ Clifford, 445.

alone.¹² Beliefs, he says, are “the sacred faculty which prompts the decisions of our will, and knits into harmonious working all the compacted energies of our being, is ours not for ourself, but for humanity.”¹³ These beliefs, which strengthen and direct a common action, must be thoroughly investigated in search of a truth for the benefit of all.

In contrast to this position, William James argues in *The Will to Believe* that the empirical project of science and the functions of religion serve non-competing needs, and there are cases when believing beyond the evidence yields the most beneficial results. Belief, for James, is not entirely subjective but rather emerges from a genuine and real possibility, requires an immediate action, and presents a momentous experience.¹⁴ Asking someone to choose between believing in either theosophy or mahomedanism is now likely a dead option because neither appeals as a real possibility. But if you ask someone to believe in either agnosticism or Christianity you are presenting a choice between two options with genuine possibility. In this sense, the option to believe must represent a genuine choice – a live hypothesis. Additionally, a belief must be forced by the need for action. If offered the choice between going out with an umbrella or without, one can simply choose to stay home. A forced option prevents the possibility of not choosing or choosing an option outside the options proposed. Finally, beliefs are formed when the opportunity is momentous and not likely to be presented again. These non-intellectual factors influence our convictions in ways that cannot easily be removed to evaluate belief based on pure reason. For James, it is not that anyone can simply believe what they want but that “the state of things is evidently far from simply; and pure insight and logic, whatever they might do ideally,

¹² Clifford, 446.

¹³ Clifford, 447.

¹⁴ William James, “The Will to Believe,” in *Philosophy of Religion: Toward a Global Perspective*, ed. Gary E. Kessler (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 1999), 450.

are not the only things that really do produce our creeds.”¹⁵ Pursuing truth and avoiding error is not a simple binary:

It may indeed happen that when we believe the truth *A*, we escape as an incidental consequence from believe the falsehood *B*, it hardly ever happens that by merely disbelieving *B* we necessarily believe *A*. We may in escaping *B* fall into believing other falsehoods, *C* or *D*, just as bad as *B*; or we may escape *B* by not believing anything at all; not even *A*.¹⁶

Avoiding belief until sufficient evidence has been accumulated will prevent all kinds of human action. Courts of law must make decisions based on the best evidence available in the moment; marriages depend on a preliminary faith in the other person. James thus argues that our will to believe is an essential component of what makes truth. This may bring about a plurality of truths, which James says ought to be delicately and profoundly respected in order to bring about the intellectual republic which will yield a spirit of inner tolerance.¹⁷

In the terms and categories I have used in this thesis, the debate between these two figures comes down to: “is evidence something which floats free of human projects, or is the demand for evidence simply a demand from other human beings for cooperation on such projects.”¹⁸ According to James, our obligation to ‘truth’ is not about getting things right, as mistakes are common and “surely not such awfully solemn things.”¹⁹ Rather, our obligations to be rational are formed in relation to the claims of other people and our need to justify beliefs arise only when such actions interfere with the fulfillment of other’s needs.²⁰ But who is to decide whose needs take precedence? What is good and fulfilling for one person or group to believe may not be good or fulfilling for another person or group. How then can contradictory truth claims co-exist in a context of plurality? The evidentialism of Clifford’s argument holds no

¹⁵ James, 452.

¹⁶ James, 452.

¹⁷ James, 456.

¹⁸ Rorty, *Pragmatism as Anti-Authoritarianism*, 19.

¹⁹ James, “The Will to Believe,” 453.

²⁰ James, 453.

revelatory solution to this problem as the scientific method on which it asserts objectivity has been successfully debunked by Latour, Stengers, and others who show the subjective inflection of all investigations.

How do we move beyond this impasse? Rorty says that such disagreements cannot be decided without resort to force. “Both sides may agree that, although they understand what each other says perfectly well, and share common views on most topics (including, perhaps, the recognition of contingency), there seems no prospect of reaching agreement on the particular issue at hand. So, both sides say as they reach for their gun, it looks as if we’ll have to fight it out.”²¹ Using force to defend (religious) ideology was a concern for Enlightenment thinkers, who sought to avoid the emotional call to arms through the tempered practice of rationalism. As has been shown, the form of rationalism that emerged from Enlightenment secularism has defined its own unique set of ideological boundaries that now collide with contradictory (often religious) domains. The ecological model does not ignore the violence that occurs when contradictory domains interact, but rather tempers violence by reinforcing a context in which a plurality of beliefs and ideologies co-mingle at intimate proximity thus limiting the possibility of extremity and explosive clashes. Assuming this perspective, ‘religion’ is not one substantive category; it is a set of varied, complex, and interrelated beliefs, values, and practices that transform over time, just like ‘secularism.’ Taking this into account, the multiplicity of realities that compose ‘religion’ and ‘secularism’ allows for violence to occur at a more granularized level that may reduce the impact and explosion of extremity.

Tyson Yunkaporta says in *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*, “creation started with a big bang, not a big hug: violence is part of the pattern [...] it must be

²¹ Rorty, *Pragmatism as Anti-Authoritarianism*, 66.

carefully structured within rituals governed by the patterns of creation and the law of sustainable cultures derived from those patterns. Violence employed in these highly interdependent and controlled frameworks serves to bring spirit into balance and hold in check the shadow of the I-am-greater-than deception. Every organism in existence does violence and benefits from it in reciprocal relationships.”²² To appropriately manage the inevitable outcome of violence, ‘highly interdependent and controlled frameworks’ are necessary to creatively redescribe dichotomous domains as interrelated dyads whose interaction has the potential to bring forth new metaphors and ways of being. As a historic and ongoing source for rituals, I maintain that religion has the potential to transform the relationship between disparate domains and, perhaps, has the potential to redescribe the inevitable violence in generative terms that brings spirit and balance to a complex ecosystem.

²² Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* (New York: Harper Collins, 2021), 199.

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