Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays, Charles Taylor (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2011), 424 pp., $39.95 cloth.

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The publication of these essays by the philosopher Charles Taylor in a single volume gives readers access to his understanding of late-modern societies. Like his Gifford Lectures, collected in *A Secular Age*, these essays—addressing social, political, and ethical questions—challenge various theories of modernity made famous by Max Weber and others. In Taylor's terms, the "subtraction theory"—that is, the theory that defines modernity as a form of life with the religious subtracted from it—is a misunderstanding of the current situation. Taylor here provides a compelling response to that account of modernity grouped under three headings: "Allies and Interlocutors," "Social Theory," and "Themes from *A Secular Age*." Given the range of topics, thinkers, and problems that the book engages, it is impossible to review it as a single argument. That said, the book does present interlocking sub-arguments that are the focus of this review.

One argument Taylor has made for some time is about the object and form of thought appropriate to political science and social theory. "The great challenge of this century," he writes, "for both politics and for social science, is that of understanding the other" (p. 24). What then is the nature of understanding human beings? Against strands of political science that argue for the use of statistical and "scientific" models of society, Taylor advocates a hermeneutical turn in social thought. The task of "understanding" is not coming to know "objects" but, rather, engaging an interlocutor. Understanding another involves a "fusion of horizons," as H.-G. Gadamer argued, that widens and deepens one's own life. "The challenge," as Taylor puts it here, "is to be able to acknowledge the humanity of [the other's] way, while still being able to live ours" (p. 38). The profundity of social life "resides in our having certain ends of life, which we endlessly redefine . . . without our ever fully understanding the reasons for them" (p. 55). Human existence transpires in a moral space defined by the strong evaluations people hold about the ends of life. That being the case, social theory is hermeneutical rather than narrowly scientific.

Taylor weaves another argument related to his claims about understanding through this volume. On Taylor's account, human action is only understandable within the context of value schemes—that is, beliefs about ends or goods that define a moral space of life. What is the shape of the contemporary moral space of life? Two points are important. First, as Taylor argues in the chapter "Perils of Moralism," modern liberal societies manifest a kind of "code fetishism." That is, social life is marked by the need to define and apply codes of conduct to people under the assumption that codes make sense in the absence of a shared conception of the social good. For instance, mandatory sentencing laws are meant to deter crime even though there is no consensus about the meaning and purpose of punishment. Taylor's worry is that the focus on codes leads to a "rage for order" in which societies try to remake human beings according to their fixed social rules. Often, and in my judgment

mistakenly, Taylor attributes the origin of this fetish to Protestantism because of the powerful role Protestantism has played in the formation of the "modern" world. Whatever the genealogy, he contends that the fixation on codes cannot adequately help us understand our moral and ethical lives because situations cannot be completely foreseen and there is a "plurality of goods" that "can conflict in certain circumstances" (p. 348).

This leads us to his second point: that the plurality of goods and the need to address conflicts among them is why people hold, explicitly or not, some scheme of evaluation that orders these values and goods. The task of understanding social and political action, therefore, requires what we can call a "moral hermeneutics"—an account of the goods, strong evaluations, and codes that guide human life at a particular time. This is why Taylor, in *Sources of the Self*, explored the formation of the modern sense of the self, but also the shift in ideas about secularism in *Modern Social Imaginaries*, *A Secular Age*, and these essays. Social and political thinking needs to be hermeneutical and also ethical in character.

These interlocking arguments about understanding, human action, goods, and codes bring us to the importance of religion in Taylor's recent work. His claim, developed in chapters on Iris Murdoch, religious mobilizations, and in most of the chapters in part three, is twofold. First, modernity has narrowed the space of life to what he calls the immanent frame—that is, to the framing of life within a naturalistic and social world without reference to any transcendent or sacred realm. Taylor argues that existence also includes beliefs about the good (ethical claims) and also "what can command our fullest love" (religious convictions) (p. 5). Human life is not trapped in the immanent frame but open to irruptions of "higher times," as he calls them, that interrupt mundane history and are always moved by loves that exceed the domain of codes, and lived in relation to some "unconditional" reality—say, God, since God, by definition, is not conditioned by the world. Second, this fact about human openness to the unconditioned also clarifies cultural shifts, such as the claim by many people that they are spiritual but not religious. Rather than religious experience being dictated by external authority (say, the Church), our "post-Durkheimian" situation, as he calls it, is open to a variety of religious forms that challenge the modern "buffered self" and the idea that the religious is mainly about individual experience.

Taylor observes that in the present age there are many secularities, and some of them, drawing on ancient religious forms, "compensate for our own [modern] narrowness, to remind us of all that we need to complement for our partiality" (p. 168). Stated otherwise, there is in human life a drive for wholeness that is stifled in a modernity defined by moral codes, the reduction of human action through explanatory sciences, an atomized or buffered self, and also restricted ideas about the meaning and value of human existence itself. The religions—so he argues—hold resources for a more capacious and adequate conception of social and personal life. Modernity is defined not by the subtraction of religion, but, rather, by various strategies for accessing and living religious convictions and the strong evaluations they entail. In the "secular age" there are then many ways of being "spiritual" and religious that

intersect in complex ways with secular commitments.

How to assess this book? As a philosopher, Taylor avoids making theological claims or normative judgments about the religious domain; he is content to draw on his own Catholic tradition about the depth of human life. Yet, oddly, Taylor's work rarely engages in depth actual scholars of religion or theologians, many of whom anticipated some of his arguments. For instance, Taylor's conception of "strong evaluations" resembles the theologian Paul Tillich's idea of "ultimate concern." The idea that modernity has its own forms of religiousness has long been explored, and of course many have expressed worries about the narrowing of human experience. In order for us to evaluate Taylor's ideas about "religion," and the place of ritual and codes in religious life, he would have to engage work in theology and religious studies that have dealt with questions about secularity for a long time.

At issue is not Taylor's bibliography; it is, rather, how to assess his argument concerning religion in social life and the extent to which the argument meets the demands of public discourse. The story Taylor tells about the present age is a compelling one. In order to assess it, one must consider the validity of the various arguments noted above, their mutual dependency, and also other work in religious studies on these topics. Doing so might give one a more nuanced picture of the dynamic force of the religions on the global scene and the challenges and possibilities that confront ethics and international life.

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