ABSTRACT
RE-ENCHANTING THE WORLD: AN EXAMINATION OF ETHICS, RELIGION, AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP IN THE WORK OF CHARLES TAYLOR

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Marquette University, 2013

In this dissertation I examine the topics of ethics, religion, and their relationship in the work of Charles Taylor. I take Taylor’s attempt to confront modern disenchantment by seeking a kind of re-enchantment as my guiding thread. Seeking re-enchantment means, first of all, defending an ‘engaged realist’ account of strong evaluation, i.e., qualitative distinctions of value that are seen as normative for our desires. Secondly, it means overcoming self-enclosure and achieving self-transcendence, which I argue should be understood in terms of transcending a ‘lower’ mode of selfhood for a ‘higher’ one in concern for ‘strong goods’.

One of the main issues that Taylor raises is whether re-enchantment requires theism for its full adequacy. He advances – often as ‘hunches’ – controversial claims regarding the significance of theism (1) for defending strong evaluative realism and (2) for motivating an ethic of universal human concern. I seek to fill out his hunches in terms of a theistic teleological perspective that is centered on the ‘telos of communion’. I argue that such a view is important for overcoming the problem of what Bernard Williams calls the ‘radical contingency’ of ethical beliefs, which seems to undermine their normative authority. However, I argue that if a non-theistic view of cosmic purpose (e.g., Thomas Nagel’s view) can be regarded as a viable option, then it could also help to address this problem and support a kind of re-enchantment. Taylor also advances the controversial view that (3) there is an ineradicable draw to ‘transcendence’ in human life in connection to the quest for the meaning of life. Here he opposes certain mainstream theories of secularization that see it as a process involving the ineluctable fading away of the relevance of religion. I seek to fill out and defend Taylor’s view in this matter.

Besides providing a reading of Taylor’s work as a whole and advancing further some of the issues he raises, I also examine his general evaluative framework based on his account of strong evaluation. In doing so I show how he provides a distinct and important perspective among contemporary moral philosophers.