



PhD thesis

**Can art be a medium for connection with God: reflections on
Taylor, Aquinas and Maritain
Masucci, M.M.**

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Can Art Be a Medium for Connection with God: Reflections on Taylor, Aquinas and Maritain

Mark Michael Masucci

OCMS, PhD

October 2024

ABSTRACT

This research project is dedicated to exploring fresh expressions of the Church's mission in the context of a secular generation. It aims to raise important questions at the intersection of theology, art, culture, and Christian mission, and to illustrate how the Church can engage a secular generation through art. The project proposes a bridge that connects philosopher Charles Taylor's concept of fullness with the theological understanding of how individuals in a secular age might connect with the transcendent God through art. To achieve this, the project critically examines Taylor's influential analysis of secularization, Neo-Thomist anthropology, and Jacques Maritain's theory of art.

This dissertation proceeds through a triangulation of concepts. First, Taylor's secularization theory is the necessary context for understanding and developing his notion of *fullness*. Taylor coined this term to describe experiences that make life worth living. Fullness provides the pathway, the trajectory to transcendence. Transcendence is the end goal. The term transcendence has a variety of definitions and concepts associated with it. The definition employed in this research project is the presence of God as he is manifest in the immanent frame. Second, Thomas Aquinas' concept of humanity as *imago Dei* answers the question of *why* a person is capable of experiencing fullness. Perhaps more importantly, Neo-Thomist anthropology proposes that human beings are the horizon between heaven and earth. This understanding of humanity allows this study to go beyond Taylor and suggest that aesthetic experiences of works of art can be experiences of the transcendent God. Third, Neo-Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain's theory of art answers the question of *how* a person might experience fullness through the experience of art. The study will conclude with a case study of a modern ballet that will demonstrate the plausibility of the research's claims.

The contribution of this research is to build on the foundation laid by Taylor and then take Taylor a step further to provide a theological bridge between the philosophical concepts of Taylor and Maritain. This theological bridge connects the notion of the experience of fullness and the experience of art to conclude that art can be a medium for an encounter with the transcendent God. This study's main findings are, first, that Taylor's philosophical search for fullness and transcendence is the theological longing for God, which exists in each person. Second, while Taylor offers many possible options for the experience of fullness - events, activities or conditions - this study focuses specifically on the aesthetic experience of art as a medium for the experience of fullness. However, this study will take Taylor a step further. Art is a *locus theologicus*, a theological space. It is a space in which the presence of God is active and can be encountered. Therefore, this study maintains that art and the aesthetic experience of art can be a medium through which the Christian Church can help people in a secular age move toward the transcendent God.

Can Art Be a Medium for Connection with God: Reflections on Taylor, Aquinas and Maritain

by
Mark Michael Masucci
MCS (Regent College, Vancouver, Canada)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Middlesex University

October 2024
Oxford Centre for Mission Studies

DECLARATIONS

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Date 29 October, 2024

STATEMENT 1

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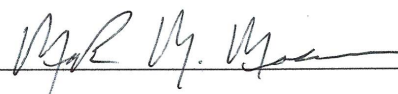
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beautiful and eternally patient wife, Dawn. She has always had confidence in me that I could accomplish this project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a debt of gratitude to so many people who contributed to this project. First, I would like to thank my Supervisors, Dr. William Dyrness and Dr. Marina Ngursangzeli Behera. Their belief in and positivity toward this project was always encouraging. Their wisdom, guidance and expertise were crucial to this project. Their tireless effort on my behalf is greatly appreciated. Through our years working together on this project they spent thousands of hours reading and re-reading my often initially incoherent work. Their feedback and critique shaped this work far better than I could have ever accomplished on my own. During my first interview with OCMS I was asked why I wanted to do a PhD and not just simply write a book. I answered that I wanted my thoughts to be evaluated and approved by leading experts in the field, so that I could move forward in confidence that I was making a worthwhile, though vastly incomplete, contribution. My desire was fulfilled.

I would also like to thank the many artists and theologians with whom I have worked these many years. Their questions regarding the integration of the arts, theology and Christian mission provided the impetus for this study which began decades ago. Our time together in the classrooms and the studios, over many years, ignited the desire to undertake a project like this. I hope I have served you well through this project.

A very special acknowledgment is in order for my proofreader, Mr. Thomas Jude Freitag. His service to this dissertation is an invaluable gift from God.

I would especially like to thank Mr. Ron Tjaden and Mr. and Mrs. Roger and Lily Rogers for their financial contributions. Without them, this project does not exist.

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Introduction

Is there a need for this project?

Artists may be the vanguard of Christian missions in a secular age.

Art can make an essential contribution to the Christian Church's missional endeavours in our contemporary Western context. It can be a theological space in which a person encounters God's presence. Thus, art can be a medium through which the Christian Church can help people in a secular age move toward the transcendent God.

The aim of this research project

This research project aims to attempt to raise questions regarding theology, art, culture and Christian mission and thus illustrate possible fresh expressions of how the Church can reach a secular generation through art. It will attempt to bridge the gap that connects philosopher Charles Taylor's philosophical notion of the experience of fullness and the theological concept of how people inhabiting a secular age could connect with or move toward the transcendent God through the medium of art. A hope is that this project will highlight the possible significance for artists who are Christian to be active in their vocation of making art as an essential component in contemporary Christian mission activity.

The questions this research addresses

The primary research question is, Can Art Be a Medium for Connection with God: Reflections on Taylor, Aquinas and Maritain. A secondary question is, Can art be a medium through which the Christian Church can help people in a secular age to move toward the transcendent God?

The Design of this project

Who am I as a researcher?

I have been serving in a primarily Protestant Christian mission organization for the past 30 years, working in teaching, Biblical studies and theology to equip missionaries in their vocation as missionaries. The campus at which I teach focuses on the fine arts. So, for these past thirty years, I have worked with recording artists and musicians, painters, poets, dancers, actors and writers, Bible teachers and theologians. I have been invited into the fine arts schools to teach the Bible and theology to equip artists theologically for mission.

I wrestled with several questions. First, how can artists understand their art theologically? How can theology and art come together in a robust missional context? The intent of pursuing these questions is missiological: to help equip the artist for the Christian mission. The idea for this project came from my participation in both worlds, theology and the arts, for thirty years, intending to equip artists theologically and theologians artistically. What I considered was missing within the missional discourse was a theory, a paradigm, or a teaching that would bridge the gap at the intersection of theology, art and mission.

A new piece of the puzzle formed in the 1990s and into the 2000s. Popular writers were producing works about postmodernism¹ and the Emerging Church.² Lesslie Newbigin had written *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Eerdmans, 1989). The discourse on mission now had another dimension: pluralism and a new kind of Christian spirituality. Modern, or perhaps postmodern, culture had characteristics and social dynamics that posed new

¹ Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity*, (London and New York: Verso, 1998); Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*, (New York: The Guildford Press, 1991); Lawrence E. Cahoon, *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology Expanded* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003).

² Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005); Bruce Sanguin, *The Emerging Church: A Model for Change and a Map for Renewal*, (CopperHouse, 2008); Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Culture*, (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2005); Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Boss, 2001).

challenges for mission. Now, not only do we need to equip theologians artistically and artists theologically, but a cultural piece needs to be addressed because it affects how we do our mission theologically and artistically. New questions emerged within the missiological and cultural discourse, such as ‘How do we bring together the theological and the artistic in the current pluralistic or postmodern situation?’ The new version of the research emerged and was expanded. Was there a theory, a paradigm, or a teaching that bridged the gap in the missiological discourse at the intersection of theology, art, *culture* and mission?

Then, in 2007, Charles Taylor wrote *A Secular Age*, and the language of the *secularization* of Western culture dominated the discourse. Taylor gave language and categories that brought a new dimension and definition to the discourse on culture. I note in Chapter One that Miller et al. somewhat push against Taylor’s secularization theory. They offer various critiques or nuanced understandings of Taylor’s proposal, which are quite good. However, I agree with Taylor’s assessment of late modernity and the immanent frame.

How is Taylor helpful? An essential aspect of missional discourse is understanding your audience or the culture you want to engage. Cultural engagement requires listening to that culture to understand how it perceives the world, what it considers valuable and what questions it asks. Taylor’s analytical narrative attempts to explain why, in the West, it was virtually impossible not to believe in God in 1500, while in 2000, unbelief is the default cultural condition. Taylor’s concepts of the modern attempt to block out transcendence, the immanent frame, the buffered self and the secular person’s desire for meaning and fullness, and malaise as the cultural emotion provide valuable cultural insight for Christian missiology. Taylor’s analysis forces the Church to ask questions such as, ‘What might be an effective way to reach unbelievers in a secular situation?’ (Or Secularity 3, to be more precise with Taylor’s terms). Taylor’s philosophical analysis of where and how secular people inhabiting the immanent frame might search for meaning and significance -

experienced in moments of fullness - offers a starting point for Christians who desire to be missional and engage with culture. I desired to discover a theory, paradigm, or teaching that could contribute to artist's mission at the intersection of theology, art, culture, and mission.

In the fall semester of 2014, I was preparing for a class with the Musicians for Missions Institute (MMI). I came across a book by Manuel Luz titled *Imagine That: Discovering Your Unique Role as a Christian Artist* (Moody, 2009). I had read H.R. Rookmaaker's classic work *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture* (Inter-Varsity, 1973). Rookmaaker's perspective was, as the title suggests, antagonistic toward modern art. According to Rookmaaker, modern art was one gnostic and nihilistic cult among many that emerged in the 20th century. The discourse on modern art within Christian circles leaned heavily in favour of the view that modern art was another vehicle for the propagation and proliferation of despair and nihilism. Christians should, therefore, avoid modern art. Thus, having ingested significant doses of Rookmaaker, I was ready and open to another perspective that might help my artists. Luz's work provided a beginning to that new perspective.

The Foreword of *Imagine That* describes the modern situation in similar concepts to Taylor, although it does not use Taylor's particular vocabulary. Modern people 'are hungering for a fresh way to experience the world, God and themselves, because the ruts of their inner world have them stuck and stagnant' (Luz, 2009, pg. 9). This sounds much like Taylor's concept of modern malaise.

Luz explains the book came out of a desire he had to know himself and who he was as an artist who is a Christian. He confessed (Lux, 2009, pg. 13),

One day, after being a creative arts pastor for over fourteen years, I suddenly realized that I had no theology of art. That is, I didn't have any systematic understanding of God related to art and the artist. More personally, I had no practical understanding of God as it related to the artist that is me. I had some ideas, things I had learned and picked up over the years, but I really had no theology upon which I could understand myself as an artist, or how God perceives and receives my art, or the nature of God as an artist, or even my role as a creative arts pastor. In a real sense, I realized that my understanding of my art as it related to my faith was insufficient, incongruent and incomplete.

Luz concludes that art and the experience of art can help a person know three things: him- or herself, theology, and God.

This was an exciting find for me. I thought that this was the kind of perspective I was looking for. In my opinion, Luz is on to something that closes the gap between theology, the arts, culture and mission. Luz moves in a space similar to Taylor's but moves beyond Taylor's. Luz talks about knowing the self, which is Taylor's point in *Sources of the Self*. Luz also sees the need for sound theology; this was my burden as a teacher.

Moreover, it is not only sound theology for the sake of theology but rather a theology *for the artist*. This was something I was seeking: equipping artists theologically. Luz proposes a medium for anyone interested in knowing God through art. A direction for my research appeared; I was becoming aware of something important at the intersection of theology, art, culture and mission: how art can be a means to know the self, theology and God.

Where am I situated?

As mentioned above, I have taught in a predominantly Protestant mission context for thirty years. Yet this study reflects a Roman Catholic perspective. I was looking for a theological bridge between the philosophical concepts of Taylor's secularization theory and the experience of art. I needed a *why*. If art is how people can experience fullness, transcendence and God, then what is the *why*? Various theological concepts were considered. Grace is a plausible option. Indeed, a human being cannot connect with God through art without God's operative grace. The working or moving of the Holy Spirit is also an option. God's sovereign and providential moving and activity would also be worthy options for the theological core of the study. I believe these are all necessary. This study in no way accepts a Pelagian position suggesting the lack of the necessity of grace or the initiatory or sustaining

activity of God in our relationship with him. I wholeheartedly acknowledge and affirm the theological position that any experience with God or relationship with him depends on him.

However, I wanted to take a ‘from the ground up’ perspective. I wanted to explore the question from the perspective of the person who experiences art. If the theological core begins with the initiatory activity of God, then that weakens the missional aspect of the thesis, in my opinion. I wanted to explore the dynamics of the human experience of art, so humanity as *imago Dei* became a possibility as a theological core. I wondered, ‘Is there something about the human constitution as *imago Dei* that makes human beings capable of knowing and experiencing God through art?’

Initially, I explored the Orthodox understanding of *imago Dei*. They have a wonderfully robust view of humanity as *imago Dei* and a theology of beauty. As the research progressed, I studied Protestant and Roman Catholic views. However, when I became aware of both Taylor’s and Maritain’s Neo-Thomist leanings, it seemed to make the most sense, theologically, to narrow the focus to Aquinas’ anthropology. Thus, my three main voices are Roman Catholic.

What is the problem?

A problem to be overcome in the research is connecting, or bridging the gap, between Taylor’s philosophical concept of the secular search for fullness within the immanent frame and the theological concept of connection with the Transcendent God.

A related problem is that there appears to be a gap in the literature that engages with Taylor’s notion of fullness, his concept of transcendence, or his overall theory of secularization. Few interlocutors suggest that art, or the experience of art, may be a way to address Taylor’s philosophical concerns. Many of Taylor’s interlocutors have produced

various works, including essays.³ However, only two of these authors offer an artistic or aesthetic answer to Taylor's philosophical questions. Neither of these essays provides extensive explanations.⁴

This project is intended to be theologically implicit and therefore titled, *Can Art Be a Medium for Connection with God?* This is because the starting point is Taylor's analysis of modern secular culture. Taylor only goes so far as to say that secular people in the immanent frame are looking for the experience of what he calls fullness. Fullness is a philosophical concept that describes an experience in life through an event, activity or condition, giving a glimpse of what life could or should be; it is a punctuated moment demonstrating what 'really living' looks like. Taylor only goes this far to keep the discourse within the modern philosophical arena.

However, can we build on Taylor's philosophical foundation as missional Christians? Can we provide a theological bridge that spans the gap from the philosophical concept of the experience of fullness to the theological concept of an experience of God? Taylor proposes that the world we live in could be called an *immanent frame* and that many inhabitants of the immanent frame desire transcendence. As Christians, can we step into that space, yet go a bit further, and offer that what is happening here theologically is that people are desiring God? We can propose that the philosophical desire for transcendence is the theological longing for God. We can take Taylor a step further and suggest, as Luz and the testimonies of

³ These four volumes contain 48 essays responding to Taylor's notion of fullness, his concept of transcendence, or his theory of secularization. See: Michael Warner, Jonathan Vanantwerpen and Craig Calhoun, eds., *Varieties of Secularism In A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2010); Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Vanantwerpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Carlos Colorado and Justin D. Klassen, eds., *Aspiring to Fullness in a Secular Age: Essays on Religion and Theology in the Work of Charles Taylor* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014); Colin Hansen, ed., *Our Secular Age: Ten Years Of Reading And Applying Charles Taylor* (Deerfield: TGC, 2017).

⁴ Alan Noble, "The Disruptive Witness of Art," in *Our Secular Age: Ten Years of Reading and Applying Charles Taylor* (Deerfield: TGC, 2017), pgs. 134-145, and Mike Cosper, "Piercing the Immanent Frame with An Ultralight Beam," *Our Secular Age: Ten Years of Reading and Applying Charles Taylor* (Deerfield: TGC, 2017), pgs. 148-159.

the voices in Chapter Three of this study do, that art is such a theological space in which people can encounter fullness, transcendence, and thus God. However, we must begin with Taylor's philosophical concept of fullness.

Key concepts and how they will be employed in the research

Transcendence

Transcendence has a variety of definitions. Taylor has several nuanced definitions of the concept in his works. Taylor does not mention transcendence in *Sources of the Self*. He defines transcendence in *A Catholic Modernity?* In this work, he defines transcendence incarnationally as 'weaving the life of God' into one's ordinary life. In this sense, a person experiences self-transcendence for the benefit of another. However, in *A Secular Age*, Taylor moves beyond that understanding and defines *transcendence* as something beyond the immanent frame. Transcendence could be understood as some agency or power beyond the immanent order. For some people, it might be God; for others, some force or agency; for others still, like Taylor, it is the transcendent God, the God of Abraham. For Taylor, this God has been displaced from social life and appears absent within the immanent frame. Therefore, any possible connection to this God must be posited and explained within the immanent frame.

Moreover, according to Taylor, transcendence is the meaning of fullness. Experiences of fullness are meant to direct or orientate a person to something higher and more profound, i.e., the transcendent. Paul D. Janz is a helpful interlocutor to Taylor. He argues that Taylor's concept of transcendence is limited to 'not immanence' and offers a position which enhances Taylor's concept. Rather than speak of transcendence in terms of distance and gaps, Janz suggests we see transcendence in the Augustinian sense of nearness. Janz draws from St. Augustine's thought that God exists in his *unspeakability*, *unthinkability*, and *invisibility*, yet

is nearer to a person in that person's interiority than even as one person is to another. This study agrees with Janz. Taylor's definition of transcendence needs filling out, and Janz sets us in a positive direction. Therefore, building on Taylor's concept of transcendence and Janz's critique and revision, the definition of transcendence that this study will employ is: transcendence is the presence of God as manifested within the immanent frame. Moreover, his transcendent presence is operative in art; art is a locus of God's transcendent presence.

Fullness

Fullness is the term that Taylor coined. In a 2008 interview, Taylor stated that he was looking for a generic word that people of various religious or philosophical persuasions could identify with, a term that describes the intuitive desire and sense that everyone has for 'a fantastically realized life, a life realized to the full.' Questions such as, 'What is a fully realized life?' 'What is really living?' emerged in Taylor's secularization discourse. Taylor wants to remain neutral; he does not want a term that reflects any particular religious position. However, because his notion of fullness leans heavily on the concept of transcendence, fullness seems interwoven with transcendence and thus orientates a person to 'religious' categories of experience. Fullness captures the intuitive sense that life is meaningful and worth living. Experiences of fullness alert a person to life as it should or could be. Fullness can be experienced in an event, activity or condition when a person enjoys an event, activity or aspect of life. Fullness can be aspirational. Fullness can be inspirational. An experience of fullness can help a person to see the world differently and engage the world differently. An experience of fullness can be transformational. An experience of fullness can motivate a person to take a different path, to orientate his or her life in new, more meaningful directions.

The immanent frame

The *immanent frame* is crucial to Taylor's analysis of late modernity. The term describes the world as secular people understand it. It is a framework, often unexamined and unchallenged, that provides the background for modern thinking. It is not a set of beliefs but the context in which beliefs and values are formed. In other words, within the immanent frame, there exists no need for outside forces to explain or give meaning to life. It is a description of the world in which asking the questions of life or finding meaning in life can happen without reference to the transcendent, God, or things beyond the immanent, material world. It is a natural world over against a supernatural one.

However, according to Taylor, inhabitants of the immanent frame can have either an open 'take' or a closed 'take' on the frame. A 'take' is a person's perspective or construal regarding the frame. In other words, some secular people could accept some form of transcendence as existing or operating within the frame. According to Taylor, most people have a closed take, meaning they do not accept the idea of transcendence. Taylor calls this the buffered self. These people are either resistant or indifferent to the idea of transcendent reality operating within the frame.

An aspect of the immanent frame that is important for this study is what might be called the Romantic impulse. According to Taylor, the Romantic movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries continues to exercise tremendous influence over modern people today. The Romantic rejection of the Enlightenment's emphasis on rationality brought a need to recognize human individuality to the fore. With his or her own feelings, emotions, inclinations and choices, the individual becomes the primary source of truth and meaning. The Romantic search for the authentic self moves through expressionism and art in both the creation and experience of art. The modern era could be considered Post-Romantic in its outlook and engagement. According to Taylor, people in our contemporary situation retain

many of the values and beliefs of Romanticism, mainly its focus on the individual and his or her quest for meaning, autonomy, and authenticity. Therefore, I will propose that art can be a medium for the experience of fullness because, in some sense, we are all Romantics now.

Christian mission

The Church should be aware of this perspective of the world - the immanent frame and its Romantic impulse - as this is where the Church attempts to carry out its mission. The Church offers a different view of the world than an immanent frame, but she must recognize and acknowledge the terms of the contemporary discourse. Only then can the Church begin its mission in order to effectively help secular unbelievers move toward the transcendent God, as well as introduce questions of God to secular people.

Mission in this study is broadly defined. This dissertation does not define the mission, or the mission of the Church, in the narrow sense of ‘evangelism’ in which a Christian, or Christians, offer an explicit presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in an attempt to get a person to commit to follow Christ. Instead, the mission would include anything the Church might do in order to point unbelievers to the transcendent God, anything the Church might do to invite unbelievers into a relationship with the transcendent God, and anything the Church might do in order to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ, either explicitly or implicitly. Mission is the engagement of the Church within her context whereby she helps unbelievers move toward the transcendent God. Therefore, it will be suggested that art can be a medium for such an endeavour.

Art

Philosopher Jacques Maritain puts forward the concept or definition of art employed in this study. Maritain is a Neo-Thomist and thus locates art within the human person. For

Maritain, art is not the object on the wall or in the gallery; rather, it is a virtue or the stable disposition of the practical intellect. It is the capacity for making. Maritain is unique among 20th-century art philosophers in this regard. The discourse regarding art focused on the object on the wall or in the gallery. However, the practice of art and the works it produced constantly changed throughout the century; various art styles and movements emerged, each contributing to the discussion regarding the definition of art. Multiple iterations of the formula “x is a work of art if and only if...” were explored to identify the necessary and sufficient conditions by which objects could be classified and accepted as works of art.

Maritain undermines that debate in a positive and helpful way. For Maritain, the creation and experience of art are primarily focused on the interiority of the human artist as a way to understand works of art. His theory explains how artists create out of their subjectivity - i.e., what they know and have experienced of the world, the things of the world, and even God and the things of God - and how that intuitive knowledge is communicated through the work. Therefore, an essential distinction between art and works of art will be maintained in this study. The artist possesses the ability to communicate higher truths relating to both the spiritual and material realities of the world because the artist knows through the intuitions, inclinations, and emotions, as well as the body and the intellect. Artists further know through their hands. Therefore, what the artist communicates is known and felt at levels deeper than the cognitive, even before the communication can be discursively explained. Maritain’s theory of art is critical because it operates at a similar interior level to Taylor’s concept of fullness. It will be demonstrated that art and the experience of art can be a medium for the experience of fullness because they are the same kind of experience.

Art is also a *locus theologicus*. It is a theological space in which a person may encounter God. It will be argued that aesthetic experiences of art can be actual encounters

with the presence of God, even if such an experience does not immediately lead the viewer into a direct saving relationship with God.

Crucial voices and why they are called upon

Charles Taylor

Taylor is key because his analysis of late modernity explains how the contemporary world is perceived by unbelievers. Taylor's work is considered an integral study of late modernity. Calhoun et al. insist that *A Secular Age* has 'singularly shaped current discussions of secularism and secularity.'⁵ This analysis sets the scene for artists who are Christians who desire to employ their craft in Christian missions.

Taylor's secularization thesis is thus the necessary context for understanding his notion of fullness. Taylor calls our current cultural situation a *secular age*. What will make life worth living is the experience of what Taylor terms *fullness*.

Thomas Aquinas

The anthropology of Thomas Aquinas provides the theological core of the study. This study explores the possibility that an experience of art can be a medium for a person to experience fullness and even encounter the transcendent God. The experience of art is one activity or condition that can be how a person might experience fullness or encounter God. This study is furthered by addressing *why* this might be possible. The proposed answer is Neo-Thomist anthropology. Aquinas provides an understanding of the human person and the workings of the inner world of a person, which anticipates both Taylor and Jacques Maritain. Taylor posits the interior experience of fullness, and Maritain posits the interiority of art.

⁵ Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen eds., *Rethinking Secularism* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pg. 21.

Neo-Thomist anthropology theologically bridges the gap between the two philosophical poles of Taylor and Maritain. Four aspects of Neo-Thomist anthropology are employed in this study to demonstrate that human beings are suited and capable of experiences of fullness, as described by Taylor. First, according to Aquinas, all human beings desire happiness. Aquinas' notion of *imperfect happiness* anticipates Taylor's notion of fullness.

Second, human beings are *passionate* creatures. Sensory experiences of external objects and events can deeply move a person in their inner being. Aquinas anticipates Taylor's description of the experience of fullness by describing how the passions are aroused when a person encounters what is perceived to be good. Art operates at the same level of the interiority of a person. The person experiencing fullness and a person aroused passionately by art are having experiences of a similar nature. Therefore, Neo-Thomist anthropology offers a possible explanation of why a person may experience fullness through the medium of art.

Third, Aquinas referred to human beings as the *horizon between heaven and earth* or the bridge between the spiritual and the material. Human beings, therefore, have the capability to participate in, understand and interpret the spiritual and physical realities of the created cosmos, heaven and earth. Maritain's theory of art will draw on this concept.

Fourth, according to Aquinas, all human beings have a natural desire to know God. Artists who are Christian can contribute to Christian mission endeavours by seeking to awaken this natural desire for God through the medium of art.

Moreover, Neo-Thomist anthropology allows this study to take a step further, beyond Taylor's notion of fullness. Human beings, because they are *imago Dei* can connect with, or move toward God through aesthetic experiences of works of art.

Philosopher Jacques Maritain is also a crucial voice. Maritain, like Taylor, generally draws upon Neo-Thomist concepts and thus shares Taylor's Roman Catholic cultural imagination. More importantly, Maritain's theory of the interiority of art and the experiences of art move in the same space as Taylor's notion of fullness. Maritain offers an aesthetic response to the philosophical question of the experience of fullness. Therefore, Maritain's theory is integral to this thesis that art and the experience of art can function as a medium for the experience of fullness.

The Structure of the Thesis

Chapter One will explore Taylor's philosophical argument through his essential works, from *Sources of the Self* (1989) to *A Secular Age* (2007). In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor asks, 'What is the modern self?' 'What makes for the good life?' 'What is it that modern people seek?' To answer these questions, several themes are highlighted: human beings are moral beings searching for the good and the good life. Modern people inhabit frameworks from which they cannot escape and in which their thinking, values, and beliefs are shaped. The framework influences the *construals*, or interpretation, by which a person understands the world. The individual's attempt to answer important questions about life within this frame constitutes the story they tell themselves. This dissertation will posit that art can be significant as a medium for presenting a story that can orientate a person toward the good and flourishing within the context of ordinary life. Ordinary life can be affirmed because it is a space in which people may encounter God and can share their experiences of God.⁶ Therefore, ordinary life is an essential arena of theological concern. Therefore, I maintain that it is within the immanent and the ordinary that a person is faced with the questions of God or

⁶ Andrew Greeley, *God In Popular Culture*, (Chicago: The Thomas More Press, 1988), pg. 9.

the things of God. Moreover, it is in this space that a person may encounter the presence of God.

In *A Secular Age*, Taylor asks, ‘What does it mean to say that we live in a secular age?’ By ‘we’, Taylor means the inhabitants of the North Atlantic world. While it can be argued that secularization affects many parts of the world and this phenomenon affects the stratagem of Christian missions, this study will be limited to Taylor’s intended audience.⁷ The overall objective of the first chapter is to understand how Taylor came to formulate the notion of fullness.

Taylor’s secularization theory is not that the North Atlantic world is becoming more godless; rather, all ideologies and beliefs are contestable. No singular worldview or belief should take precedence in the modern pluralistic world. Thus, religious faith is no longer the default option for society. Secularization has passed through three phases, which Taylor calls Secularity 1, Secularity 2 and Secularity 3. Secularity 1 attempted to remove God from the public sphere. Secularity 2 saw the decline of personal faith, even if certain public or national institutions retained a religious façade. According to Taylor’s thesis, today, we find ourselves in Secularity 3. In this phase, all faith options are allowed in the discussion, but none can take precedence; all are contested and contestable. As a result, art finds a significant voice in Secularity 3 by providing a medium of dialogue that can introduce questions of God and transcendence to a secular culture.

⁷ See: Benno van den Toren, Joseph Bosco Bangura, Richard E. Seed, *Is Africa Incurably Religious? Secularization and Discipleship in Africa*, (Fortress Press: 2020) and Marina Ngursangzeli Behera, “Perspectives from the Global South: Europe the Exceptional Case?” in *Mission in Secularised Contexts of Europe: Contemporary Narratives and Experiences*, ed. by Marina Ngursangzeli Behera, Michael Biehl and Knud Jørgensen, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2018), pgs., 195-205.

How did the North Atlantic world arrive at this situation? Taylor describes how the world was *disenchanted*. The pre-modern world was an *enchanted world*. The habitants of this world recognized that the membrane between the spiritual/immaterial and the physical/material realities was rather thin. The spiritual realities interacted with the material in one united cosmos. In this world, it was unthinkable that human aspirations for flourishing could be achieved without reference to God.

Taylor concludes that in this current cultural situation, Secularity 3, modern people desire and pursue what he terms fullness without reference to God. Yet, many inhabitants of the secular age fail, or refuse, to acknowledge that transcendence is the meaning of fullness. This is a crucial point of *A Secular Age*.

Chapter Two narrows the focus. It examines what life may actually feel like for people in a secular age within a framework Taylor calls the *immanent frame*. This frame is necessary because it is the view of the world which has expelled transcendence. It is a world-in-a-box, and within this (often unchallenged) framework, modern secular thinking, values, and ethics are formulated. As modern people, we are all inhabitants of the immanent frame and, to some degree, products of it. Taylor highlights many aspects of the immanent frame. However, the aspects most important for this study are immanence, the buffered self, the age of authenticity and expressive individualism, the onset of malaise as the collective cultural emotion, and the quest for meaning. It is important to remember that these themes are descriptive, meaning that through them, people engage the world; it is how modern people see it. These are not necessarily normative; therefore, the Christian who wishes to be missional should understand these themes and then navigate a way past them.

A crucial aspect of the immanent frame is the Romantic impulse, the attitudes and values that characterized the romantic movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Art was the primary vehicle in the search for meaning and fullness due to its focus on

expressivism. Through the expressivism offered by art, the individual was able to define and communicate his or her own reality and authenticity. That sentiment remains today.

Therefore, this study proposes that art can play a significant role in the search for meaning and significance because of the Romantic nature of the immanent frame. Art can be a medium for the experience of fullness because, in some sense, we are all Romantics now.

Chapter Three will narrow the focus even more. Since it will be offered that if art, and the experience of art, can be a medium for the experience of fullness, then fullness should be adequately defined. The chapter will proceed by first doing an inductive inquiry into Taylor's explanations of fullness. According to Taylor, doing this will show what fullness is and explore its connection to transcendence. This study will then be able to explain how art and the experience of art can be a medium for the experience of fullness.

This study examines Taylor's concept of transcendence more closely. Some of Taylor's interlocutors will be called upon. The conclusion offered is that transcendence, as described by Taylor, could be defined as the presence of God as he is manifested within the immanent frame. Moreover, it will be suggested that aesthetic spaces are loci for transcendence or the presence of God. Therefore, art and the experience of art can be a medium for the experience of fullness and, ultimately, transcendence. Suppose the presence of God can be encountered in artistic and aesthetic spaces. In that case, the opportunity exists to help secular unbelievers move toward the transcendent God through art and the aesthetic experiences of works of art.

Chapter Four is the theological core of the study. A primary question to be answered is, 'What is it about human beings, in their nature and constitution, which makes experience of fullness possible?' The answer proposed is Neo-Thomist anthropology. Thomas Aquinas' concept of humanity as *imago Dei* bridges the gap between two philosophical poles. One end suggests that people desire and pursue experiences of fullness in

the secular age. On the other end, that art and aesthetic experiences of works of art can function as a medium for an experience of fullness. Humanity as *imago Dei* is why a person can have experiences of fullness, and, moving beyond Taylor, why a person can connect with the transcendent God through aesthetic experiences of works of art.

Chapter Five will introduce the theory of art put forward by philosopher Jacques Maritain. A summary of Maritain's theory is given above. Several components of Maritain's theory will be explored here. First is *poetry*. Poetry is not simply the words on a page but the creative process whereby the artist communicates *poetic* or *creative intuition* through the work. Poetic or creative intuition describes the intuitive knowledge artists have through engagement with the world manifested in their works of art. The artist possesses the ability to communicate higher truths, which are usually only associated with the Speculative Intellect because the artist knows through intuitions, inclinations, and emotions, as well as the body and the intellect. Artists further know through their hands. Therefore, what the artist communicates is known and felt at levels deeper than the cognitive, even before the communication can be discursively explained. Because human nature possesses the faculty of *poetic intuition*, a person can have *poetic experiences*. *Poetic experience* is the intense moment in which an encounter with an aesthetic object captures the self. Artists, both Christian and non-Christian, recognize this ability. The import of Maritain's theory of art is that art operates at a similar interior level to Taylor's concept of fullness. It will be demonstrated that art and the experience of art can be a medium for the experience of fullness because they share the same kind of experience.

Thus, Maritain's Neo-Thomist concept of art can provide an aesthetic framework for a philosophical answer to Taylor's question of the experience of fullness. Art and the aesthetic experience of works of art can be a medium for the experience of fullness, not because of anything inherent in the object on the wall or in the gallery. Art can be such a

medium because the interior reality of the creation of works of art, viewing works of art, and the experience of fullness are similar kinds of experiences.

Chapter Six will explore Maritain's explanation of how the experience of art thus impacts the viewer of art. Maritain tackles the question of what can be known through works of art. The answer, given by Maritain and others, is the artist's subjectivity. This is what makes art and the aesthetic experience of art so alluring. Through the works of others, the viewer not only shares in the artist's story but will often hear their own. Human beings are not machines. Resonances of human experiences, emotions, and imaginations connect the artist and viewer to the shared experience of the work. This is where Taylor's concept of fullness finds its place in works of art: experiencing fullness can help us become the kind of person we desire to be. Works of art can inspire the viewer to go in new directions through the presentation of new thoughts and ideas about life derived from the artist's experiences. In turn, works of art can orientate the viewer to something higher beyond the self, to other worlds and other possibilities for the world.

World-projection is an essential concept for this study. Nicholas Wolterstorff coined it, and it describes the actions that artists perform when they create their works. World-projection is the artist projecting or presenting a world for the viewer to consider. This is the world found within or comes through the work of art itself. The viewer can find themselves within the story presented by the work; they can feel resonances and participate in the world of the work. The world of the work can make claims about the real world, which the viewer can accept or reject. The viewer is presented with a world open for their consideration. Consideration of the world of the work and what it might speak to the real world is aesthetically modulated. This is why art and the aesthetic experience of art can be a medium for the experience of fullness. The viewer is alerted and perhaps inspired, through and by the work, to something greater, higher, beyond themselves, to which they can aspire. The

experience of art can completely rearrange how a person sees, understands and engages with the world. As Taylor has noted, this is a primary function of fullness, as well.

A work of art can be a medium for the experience of fullness because a work of art can be interpreted at various levels. *Surface interpretation* occurs when the viewer appreciates and understands what the artist intended to communicate through the work. However, works of art offer deeper meanings below the surface interpretation. *Deep interpretation* is seeing meaning in the work that is beyond the artist's intention but yet within the parameters set by the surface interpretation. Through an aesthetic experience of the work of art, the viewer can be lifted to a higher plane and see the world from a broader horizon. Through the experience of a work of art, the viewer can be alerted to something or someone beyond the immanent, beyond even what the artist intended to communicate. New inspiration and aspirations can be conceived within the viewer.

The viewers must contemplate works of art. Time must be given if the work is to penetrate the entire person: body, soul, spirit, mind, will, and emotions. In this way, the viewer is drawn into the work so that it might resonate with the intuitive knowledge of the work. Through the work's aesthetic qualities, the viewer can experience aspirational and inspirational images that go beyond themselves and everyday life. The viewer can experience fullness in which the desire for something higher and more profound will be activated. Through greater cognition, the viewer may then pursue something of the world picture that has been received. The work itself may even direct the viewer toward God.

Chapter Seven will demonstrate how this might work through a case study of *Revelations*, a modern ballet by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre.

This study concludes that because works of art can be a medium for the experience of fullness, they are a way by which a person can be drawn to God. This is due to the nature of fullness. The experience of fullness is a reflection of transcendence, with transcendence being

the intended meaning of fullness. According to Taylor, fullness points a person to transcendence, or the Transcendent. Fullness provides the pathway, the trajectory, to transcendence. Transcendence is the goal.

Aesthetic experiences of works of art can be *revelatory*. They can reveal the deeper spiritual mysteries of the world. Taylor posited that all human beings have an *ineradicable bent* toward the transcendent and God. The desire for God is a fixture in humanity's ontology. The desire for God is there; it only needs to be awakened. Aesthetic experiences of works of art can provide such an awakening.

Taylor is reluctant to be explicit about his personal view of transcendence, which includes a relationship with God, although he sometimes articulates his position. He wanted to remain within the constraints of a modern philosophical discourse first and foremost. However, this dissertation is missional in its intent. Building on the philosophical foundation Taylor constructed, this dissertation will take a step further than Taylor. The research question is, 'Can art be a medium for connection with God?' The answer offered is yes. Art is proposed as the vanguard of Christian mission in the secular age.

My contribution

My contribution to knowledge is to take Taylor's theory of the desire for and the experience of fullness a step further than Taylor does. Taylor restricts his discussion of the experience of fullness to the modern philosophical arena. He wants to remain religiously neutral to invite as many readers as possible into the discourse regarding what living a fantastically lived life might look like in a secular age. This dissertation acknowledges Taylor's project and accords him success. However, I see Taylor's analysis and conclusion as a foundation to build a theory that may be profitable for Christian missions.

This study's main findings are that Taylor's philosophical search for fullness and transcendence may be the theological longing for God, which exists in each person. Second, while Taylor offers many possible options for the experience of fullness - events, activities or conditions - this study focuses specifically on the experience of art as a medium for the experience of fullness. However, I will take Taylor a step further. Art is a *locus theologicus*, a theological space. It is a space in which the presence of God is active and can be encountered. Art and the aesthetic experience of art can be a space in which a person is moved toward the transcendent God.

If this case has merit, then art can be a missional activity in a secular age. Art can be a theological space. Art can be a medium through which the Christian Church can help people in a secular age to move toward the transcendent God.

Thus, Taylor's notion of fullness, Aquinas' concept of humanity as *imago Dei*, and Jacques Maritain's theory of art coalesce at the intersection of theology, art, culture and mission.

Artists may be the vanguard for Christian missions in a secular age.

Charles Taylor's Philosophical Argument

The aim of the chapter is for the reader to attain an understanding of the philosophical context of the discourse on the experience fullness provided by philosopher Charles Taylor. To accomplish this task, we will examine the primary themes and salient points from Taylor's corpus between: *Sources of the Self* (1989) and *A Secular Age* (2007).⁸ The examination of these works will provide a broad perspective of the modern, secular context in which people seek a life worth living. The themes have been selected because they are considered integral for describing the secular milieu relative to an experience of art and fullness. This dissertation chose Charles Taylor's philosophical theory of secularization as an analytical framework because, unlike sociological studies of secularization, Taylor discusses questions of epistemology; e.g. what kind of knowledge people can have about the world or God. Taylor does not give a sociological account of modern society but characterizes our current cultural situation as a *secular age*.

The conclusion that will be drawn is that through this corpus Taylor has displayed concern with how a person can obtain a fully realized life. The language changed, and concepts were developed over time. However, the consistent motif was an evaluation of the modern social and cultural situation in order to offer a philosophical proposal of human flourishing. Taylor began his contribution to the discourse in an Aristotelian structure by

⁸ The primary works include: Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); *The Malaise of Modernity* (Concord, Ontario: Anansi, 1991). Republished as *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); *A Catholic Modernity? Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture, with responses by William M. Shea, Rosemary Luling Haughton, George Marsden, and Jean Bethke Elshtain*, James L. Heft, ed. (Oxford University Press, 1999); *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Dilip Gaonkar, Jane Kramer, Benjamin Lee and Michael Warner, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK; Belknap, 2007).

speaking of the good as an objective reality and the good life as the goal. After two decades, he landed on the concept of fullness and the experience of transcendence.

Later chapters will build on Taylor's philosophical foundation, and attempt to traverse the gap between his philosophical notion of the experience of fullness and the theological concept of how secular people could move toward the transcendent God through the medium of art.

In *Sources of the Self*, the main argument is that identity must include an understanding of the good. An understanding of the good is shaped by what Taylor calls inescapable frameworks. These frameworks provide the often unnoticed and unchallenged background in which we define ourselves and the world we live in. A person's identity - who they believe they are in the world and how they will then live - is formed by the stories we tell ourselves. One aspect of the framework is *the affirmation of ordinary life*. Ordinary life becomes a space in which the gap between the sacred and the secular becomes narrowed. A life of labour, family and procreation is now a hallowed space; ordinary activities and experiences, rather than higher or exclusively religious ones, become the spaces in which to encounter God. Ordinary activities now take on a 'religious' function. This phenomenon will have a positive impact on art and aesthetic experiences of art. Art is moving toward a space to encounter God.

In *A Secular Age*, the question of what it feels like to inhabit a secular age is explored. According to Taylor, the secularization of the North Atlantic world has occurred in phases. Taylor terms the current iteration of secularism *Secularity 3*. In this current situation, Western society is not *godless*. Various ideologies adorn the modern landscape. As a result, belief in God is no longer the default metanarrative; rather, all ideologies and worldviews are contested and contest-able. The question is not so much *what* a person believes but *why* they believe it. What are the conditions of belief?

It must be remembered, however, that Taylor's categories are *descriptive*, not normative. This is the way people in the world see and understand things of the world, so the Christian Church must acknowledge this perspective as it seeks to do the work of mission.

1 *Sources of the Self*

1.1 *Human Beings are Moral Beings*

The modern Self is on a quest for meaning (Taylor, 1989, pg. 52).⁹ The loss of meaning came about in the modern epoch because North Atlantic people dismissed the living cosmos - which contained the presence of the Transcendent God - as the grounds of a possible moral order. As a result, other potential moral sources needed to be sought. Human beings desired moral sources which, they believed, could be obtained within an immanent reality. The transcendent was no longer the sole, or even primary, source of meaning. Gerrit Benschop summarizes Taylor's question this way, 'How did alternatives to the God-reference of fullness arise?' Benschop's question reveals a crucial yet implicit aspect of Taylor's inquiry: How does a person find fullness without reference to God?¹⁰ With the advent of exclusive humanism, it has now become necessary for the individual to find meaning either from within him- or herself as an individual or from within a transcendent-less or immanent world.

In *Sources of the Self* (1989), Taylor does not employ the concept of fullness; rather he speaks about the good and the good life. Taylor's intention for the project is to 'articulate and write a history of the modern identity' (Taylor, 1989, ix). The exploration of the modern identity must include 'mapping connections' between 'identity and the good' (Taylor, 1989,

⁹ See also: Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Gerrit J. Benschop, "A Secular Age: Open Toward the Transcendent," *Philosophia Reformata*, 2009, vol., 74, no. 4, pg. 143.

x). Therefore, the apprehension of what it means to be a human agent, a person, or a self is dependent on an apprehension of the good (Taylor, 1989, pg. 3).

What are these sources Taylor is referring to? These sources include the ‘modern naturalist consciousness’ which rejects the idea that nature and status of human beings - ontology - have any importance for morality. Naturalists prefer ‘moral reactions’ and dismiss talk of ‘meaning’ and frameworks (Taylor, 1989, pg. 19). The notion of the good as an objective reality is discounted (Taylor, 1989, pg. 79). They strive to avoid a language of ‘thick descriptions’ so that human moral actions can remain in an ‘external, non-culture-bound’ realm (Taylor, 1989, pg. 80-81). In other words, Naturalist moral sources do not consider human constitution. Morals are concerned with what we ought to *do* rather than what we should *love* or *be*. The notion of the good as an objective reality is discounted (Taylor, 1989, pg. 79).

On the other side of the spectrum is the various ontological accounts of moral sources. Ontological moral accounts are concerned with whether or not moral values of good or bad, and right or wrong actually exist.

Then there is the theistic account, which Taylor opts for in his account of the search for moral sources (Taylor, 1989, pg. 521).

The moral claims that Taylor is making are claims derived from human ontology, i.e., what human beings are to be. It is not simply understanding what it is to *do* right, but rather, what it means to *be good* (Taylor, 1989, pg. 3). A person’s identity contains an awareness of where one stands in moral space and how a person answers the questions of what is good, valuable and worthwhile. Taylor describes it as (Taylor, 1989, pg. 33),

By contrast, the notion of the self which connects it to our need for identity is meant to pick out this crucial feature of human agency, that we cannot do without some orientation to the good, that we each essentially are...where we stand on this.

Therefore, any attempt to identify or define the modern self, or human personhood, must consider moral subjectivity. Therefore, a person cannot understand or identify the self

without a clear picture of what is understood to be good. The good is to be the object of our affection and our loves. Taylor writes (Taylor, 1989, pgs. 92, 93),

The Good is also that the love of which moves us to good action. The constitutive good is a moral source, in the sense that I want to use the term here; that is, it is a something the love of which empowers us to do and be good... The constitutive good does more than just define the content of the moral theory. Love of it is what empowers us to be good. And hence also loving it is part of what it is to be a good human being. This is now part of the content of the moral theory as well, which includes injunctions not only to act in certain ways and to exhibit certain moral qualities, but also to love what is good.

The essential point for Taylor is that identity is the foundation of the moral self, more than any moral principle derived from reason. Morality derives from being a good human being.

Gary Kitchen disagrees with Taylor's assessment here.¹¹ Kitchen does not see how it is 'crucial' for human agency to hold the position that Taylor does. He agrees with Taylor that what is 'at stake' in moral discourse is 'our identity and way of life.' However, for Kitchen, it does not follow that identity is to be considered more fundamental or basic than 'explicit moral principle.' Kitchen asserts that focusing on identity in this way may 'mislead us,' as stressing identity over principles 'does little to bolster moral realism' (Kitchen, 1999, pg. 39).

Ultimately, Kitchen dismisses Taylor's thesis because Kitchen recognizes Taylor's own identity as a Christian (Kitchen, 1999, pg. 48). Kitchen does not intend to be 'reductive' regarding Taylor's work; however, Taylor's thesis is easier to dismiss for 'other people [who] have different identities, different values' and for whom Christianity is not a plausible option. As well, Kitchen notes that Taylor had earlier made a comment that he put forward a 'hunch' that non-theistic sources would prove inadequate for modern moral sources (Kitchen, 1999, pg. 49). Kitchen wonders how something so 'crucial' to Taylor as his Catholic Christian faith is, could be offered into the discourse as simply a 'hunch.' Kitchen concludes, 'Taylor seems

¹¹ Gary Kitchen, "Charles Taylor: The Malaises of Modernity and the Moral Sources of the Self," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1999, pg. 39.

to offer absolutely no justification for his belief in God as a moral source' (Kitchen, 1999, pg. 49).

I agree with Taylor and offer this comment in reply to Kitchen's criticism. Taylor is admittedly in Aristotelian space when he enters the discourse on moral sources.¹² Therefore, the apprehension of what it means to be a human agent, a person, or a self is dependent on an apprehension of the good (Taylor, 1989, pg. 3). As he wrote earlier, Taylor's moral thesis rests on what it means to *be* good, over against modern moral theory regarding what it is to *do* good.

Therefore, I maintain that there is a *realist* starting point for the discussion. It is not about speculation or theory, or as Kitchen suggests, what might be moral 'principle.' The issue is about actual lived existence. Donald Baker suggests that Taylor's presentation can be read as a transcendental argument for a specific *realist moral ontology* (Baker, 2000, pg. 162). By this, Taylor means that moral values - good and bad, right and wrong - actually exist. In other words, the basis for morality and its articulation and experience is rooted in realism. It has its origin in being and is defined by human nature and the things human beings can experience. This offers an explanation as to why the good can be sought or pursued. It exists. Clearly, all of humanity does not agree as to *what* constitutes the good, but everyone has a definition.

I agree with Taylor on this point because the aim of this dissertation is to take Taylor's theory of what the good life entails (and experiences of fullness described below) a step further than Taylor does. Taylor restricts his discussion of the good life to the arena of modern philosophical discourse. He wants to remain as religiously neutral as possible. This study intends to bridge the gap between Taylor's philosophical concept of living the good life (and the experience of fullness) and the theological concept of secular people moving toward

¹² Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: Making of the Modern Identity*, pgs. 82, 125, 211-212, 372, 439.

the transcendent God through the medium of art. Taylor's vision of the good and its relationship to identity is implicitly connected to his affirmation of God as the best moral source. Taylor's entire philosophical system implicitly orientates his readers toward the transcendent God.

What we can say at this point is that what Taylor says about the good and the good life sounds similar to a not yet fully developed articulation of fullness, perhaps a precursor of sorts – fullness in experience but in the language of the good life.

1.2 *Inescapable Frameworks: The Stories We Tell Ourselves*

Taylor makes the point that our 'phenomenological reality is shaped by "inescapable frameworks" of moral sources.'¹³ A framework is the thought system in which we think, feel and judge life (Taylor, 1989, pg. 19) and thus pursue what is perceived to be the good. This background is that from which 'we assume and draw on in any claim to rightness' (Taylor, 1989, pg. 9). Taylor's point is that we all exist and operate within moral frameworks. The framework consists of multiple construals, each contributing to the overall picture. The apprehension of the identity becomes the story that a person accepts as the truth or reality of their situation or context, and thus their life. At the largest, most pervasive level is the *worldview*. This metanarrative can be rooted in a spectrum of beliefs, from orthodox faith on the one side, to materialistic atheism on the other.

Below the level of worldview, a person will find themselves within a variety of what this dissertation terms *spheres of ultimate concerns*. These spheres are spaces which offer a variety of interpersonal relationships, each impinging on and influencing an individual in a number of ways. Family of origin, social strata or class, or ethnicity all function as a

¹³ D.P. Baker, "Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*: A Transcendental Apologetic?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, June 2000, vol. 47, no. 3, pg. 162.

repository of shared values, aesthetics and meanings. It is within these interconnected spheres that a person hears stories of the world, how these stories function and the various options of meaning to be found in them. Questions of ultimate concerns are addressed in these spaces. As a person interacts with others within the multiple array of spheres, he or she will inevitably encounter varieties of religion, humanist convictions and agnostic or atheist positions. The struggle is to apprehend one's identity from within these spheres. Therefore, questions relevant to this study are, 'Can the apprehension of identity be altered?' 'Does a medium exist that could introduce a person to an alternate understanding of the world, one that would reshape his or her beliefs, values and praxis toward the good and flourishing?' I propose that aesthetic experiences of art can be a medium for the presentation of alternative stories.

It is this framework that requires a person to make what Taylor calls *qualitative distinctions* and *strong evaluations*. I maintain that the human determination of what might be good, right and true occurs entirely within a particular horizon or field of reference. This means that the answers given to the questions of the meaning and significance in life come from an embodied, lived engagement with the world, within the framework. This engagement, therefore, includes our whole being - including our loves - body, soul, spirit, mind, will and emotions. Human beings cannot simply think our way to moral sources; they live them. Qualitative distinctions, strong evaluations, and understanding of the Good are concepts understood through lived experience.

Normal human life occurs within a framework that provides 'a "sense" of a qualitative distinction' (Taylor, 1989, pg. 21). Some definitions and discrimination of the good are necessary if a person is to locate themselves in the world. All people judge or

consider that some action or actions, modes of life, or modes of feeling are incomparably higher than others. Elsewhere, Taylor describes it,¹⁴

The desirable is not only defined for him by what he desires, or what he desires plus a calculation of consequences; it is also defined by a qualitative characterization of desires as higher and lower, noble and base, and so on. Reflection is not just a matter, where it is not calculation of consequences, of registering the conclusion that alternative A is more attractive to me, or draws me more than B. Rather the higher desirability of A over B is something I can articulate if I am reflecting as a strong evaluator. I have a vocabulary of worth.

The human moral horizon is navigated by a hierarchy of things that a person deems good. This hierarchy is delineated by strong evaluations of these goods. In other words, people live, whether they can articulate it or not, as if some aspects of life are ‘purer,’ ‘deeper,’ ‘more admirable,’ and ‘fuller’ than others (Taylor, 1989, pg. 21). Therefore, strong evaluations function to distinguish between choices that require a moral position within a hierarchy and those that do not. For example, turning off lights in a room to conserve energy constitutes a behaviour defined by a moral conviction: it is important to conserve energy. However, turning off the room lights in order to create a certain ambience, say, for a movie or romantic dinner, is not a moral choice but an aesthetic decision. Qualitative distinctions function to motivate the decision of choices with moral implications, the basis of which is determined by where a person stands in moral space (Taylor, 1989, pg. 30).

So it seems that Taylor’s initial inquiry was about the good life and how a person approaches such a life. Living the good life requires the evaluation of moral options, and is dependent upon an understanding of the good. Moral choices are made through a lived engagement with the world around us, which form a person into the kind of person he or she will be.

Therefore, I maintain that the significance of the framework is that it provides individuals with a story. The story is the space for the apprehensions of identity and is crucial

¹⁴ See also Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers, Vol. 1*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pg. 23.

to finding meaning and significance. The framework, often un contemplated and unarticulated, provides the background for the story in which a person finds him- or herself. The answers given to the questions of ultimate concerns posed in the story are to be answered through a lived engagement with the inhabited world. Recording artist Matt Maher explores the power of the Stories we tell ourselves and how they shape life positively or negatively. He sings,¹⁵

This town has a ceiling that you'll never break through
You'll always be alone in a crowded room
And no matter how hard you work, it's true
You'll never be enough just being you
These are the stories I tell myself

The framework and the story are essential to this thesis. The story that a person finds him- or herself within will be the (often unknown and unarticulated) background from which a person will make determinations of the good life and the necessary qualitative distinctions and strong evaluations. Important questions for this dissertation are, 'Can the story that a person tells him- or herself be altered or reconfigured?' and 'Where can a person discover an alternate story?' I will propose that aesthetic experiences of art can serve this function.

It is worthwhile to introduce here an important concept that will be explored later in this dissertation: Nicholas Wolterstorff's concept of art as *world-projection*.¹⁶ It is through works of art that the artist can share a new story with the viewers, an alternative narrative, a new world; what is presented in the work is a world for consideration. In the world of the work, the artist may make claims about the actual world. Wolterstorff writes,

Though the fictional projection of a world is an activity distinct from that of making claims about our actual world, yet one can make a claim about our actual world by fictionally projecting a work's world...So even though telling a tale is not to be identified with making a claim, yet one can make a claim *by* telling a tale. One can make a point by telling a story.¹⁷

¹⁵ Matt Maher, written by Matt Maher, Jacob Sooter, Luke Smallbone, Joel Smallbone, "Stories I tell Myself," *Stories That I tell Myself*, track 6, Apple Music, October, 2022.

¹⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Action of World-Projection," in *Art in Action: Toward A Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pgs., 122-155.

¹⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pg., 107.

Thus, the viewer's framework can be adjusted or revised. Therefore, art and aesthetic experiences of art can be a medium that introduces the viewers to new possibilities for the world for their consideration. Moreover, it invites them to share the artist's experiences and conceptions of the world. This happens through the experience of fullness, of which art can be a medium.

1.3 *The Affirmation of Ordinary Life*

The Protestant Reformation created what Taylor calls *the affirmation of ordinary life*. This 'new model of civility' came to fruition in the eighteenth century. This model of life brought a 'social levelling' by which 'the good life' was now accessible to all citizens. The primary emphasis is the rejection of the supposed necessity of 'mediation' to enjoy a relationship with God, or the things of God (Taylor, 1989, pg. 214). This included the Mass, the sacerdotal system and the church as the 'locus and vehicle of the sacred' (Taylor, 1989, pg. 216). Ordinary life is now the space in which everyone can have equal access to God, morality, and fullness. Everyone can participate. There now exists a dignity in ordinary life in contrast to what was considered the higher activities of 'contemplation, war, active citizenship, or heroic asceticism' (Taylor, 1989, pg. 23). The affirmation of ordinary life emphasized that each individual believer was now responsible for his or her faith, personal commitment and relation to God. Taylor stresses this positive aspect of the affirmation of the ordinary life. The fullness of the Christian life is to be found not only in higher Christian callings or vocations but also in a life grounded and lived in its *ordinariness*. Ordinary life is to be hallowed (Taylor, 1989, pg. 223).

However, the affirmation of ordinary life is itself *immanent*; it demands an account of life in the here and now. What is crucial Taylor writes (Taylor, 1989, pg. 218),

[I]s this positive side, the affirmation that the fulness of the Christian experience was to found within the activities of this life, in one's calling and in marriage and the family.

Much of the art of the day reflected this desire to highlight aspects of ordinary life. Ordinary people and events of life were celebrated by reformation-era painters. One such work is *The Peasant's Wedding* (1567), by Pieter Bruegel. Many of Bruegel's works depicted various aspects of peasant life.



1. *The Peasant's Wedding*

Another work celebrating the ordinary person in ordinary life is *The Girl with the Pearl Earring* (1665).



2. *The Girl with the Pearl Earring*

In these works, the beauty of ordinary life is portrayed: a peasant's wedding and a common yet beautiful girl. The viewer can contemplate these works and be inspired to reach for what is higher and profound about life. They can envision the life of God within ordinary life - the transcendent manifesting within the immanent.

However, the initial positive impetus for the affirmation of the ordinary life had to be checked by the warning to not overly love the things of this world. Taylor cites Puritan writers of the time who warned against being too 'absorbed' in temporal goods (Taylor, 1989, pg. 222). This follows St. Augustine's theology of 'rightly ordered loves.'¹⁸ The use of things of this world should move us to love God and thus seek higher things, not to love things in and for themselves.

An unintended consequence of the affirmation of ordinary life is what Taylor calls an *anthropocentric shift* in which the purposes of Divine providence narrow. It was now thought that God's singular intention for human society was flourishing here and now in an immanent *order of mutual benefit* (Taylor, 2007, pgs. 221-225).¹⁹ Taylor's conclusion is this emphasis on ordinary life has led to further separation between the immanent and the transcendent. The result is the more secular 'need to make God more fully present in everyday life and its contexts, which led people to invest these contexts with a new significance and solidity.' In other words, the significance of this shift is the desire and striving to find God, not *out there*, but within the horizons in which people actually live. Ordinary activities and experiences, rather than the exclusively higher ones, necessarily become the spaces in which to encounter God. Ordinary activities must take on a religious function.

¹⁸ St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), Book I, chapter 27; <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/doctrine.html>.

¹⁹ Taylor surveys four directions in the anthropocentric shift: 1) Humanity only owes God that we go along with his plan which is essentially to establish a moral order that benefits all inhabitants 2) The eclipse of grace. The rise of Deism emphasized the power of reason and discipline to achieve the social goal 3) The sense of mystery fades. God is less inclined to intervene in human activity through the miraculous 4) The doctrine of human transformation is relegated to the afterlife. The primary goal of humanity is the polite society, not any sort of *theosis*.

How does this contribute to the thesis that aesthetic experiences of art can be a medium for the experience of fullness? First, in the above-described situation, Taylor points out that a *disembedding* has taken place (Taylor, 2007, pg. 355). Events and activities that were formerly associated with higher and religious times have been removed from their original context. For example, The Mozart G Minor Quintet, which can profoundly move the hearer through its beauty and richness, need no longer be experienced exclusively in the Mass. The secular music lover can receive a similarly profound experience in the Concert Hall. However, while the music remains beautiful, moving and arresting, the story isn't there - the story being the Christian narrative, which is the original context in which the music was created and in which the music was intended to be appreciated. The music was intended to direct the listener to the Transcendent God of the Christian faith. The secular hearer may still be moved in a profound way, though the actual object of the music, which is God, is not recognized as present. The music can now be heard as simply music and not be experienced as a medium for an experience of the transcendent. Taylor says that this leaves a 'residual mystery' (Taylor, 2007, pg. 356) so that a question is posed by the secular music lover, 'Why am I so moved?' The listener continues to *feel* something - profoundly, though the origin, content or object is not perceived. The secular listener may now ponder a further question, 'What is this experience about?'

1.4 *The Affirmation of Ordinary Life in Art*

A positive aspect of the affirmation of ordinary life is that art is moving toward a space in which to encounter the transcendent God in the modern era. Andrew Greeley is helpful here because he, like Jacques Maritain, shares Taylor's Catholic imagination. He states the situation simply and concisely: 'My thesis is simple enough: Popular culture is a

locus theologicus, a theological place - the locale in which one may encounter God.’²⁰ He explains,

Popular culture provides an opportunity to experience God and to tell stories about God or, to put the matter more abstractly, to learn about God and to teach about God.

He defines popular culture as that which ‘is produced by those arts and crafts which people enjoy as opposed to those arts and crafts which the “self-defined” elites enjoy. Krystoff Penderecki is high culture, Bruce Springsteen is pop culture’ (Greeley, 1988, pg. 9-10). Popular culture ‘does tend, implicitly or explicitly to offer paradigms of meaning’ (Greeley, 1988, pg. 13). This is why it is an arena of theological concern. Therefore, it is important that we ‘keep an open mind about the possibility that experiences, images and stories of God are to be found in popular culture’ (Greeley, 1988, pg. 17). These experiences can offer a satisfactory platform for ‘catechetics and homiletics’ (Greeley, 1988, pg. 18). Therefore, I maintain, it is within the immanent and the ordinary that a person is faced with the questions of God, or the things of God. Moreover, a person may encounter the presence of God.

Greeley holds this position because he sees the corollary between a religious imagination and a creative imagination. Culture itself is the ‘result of creative imagination leaping to creative imagination - from the writer to the reader, the artists to the viewer, the musician to the listener’ (Greeley, 1988, pg. 19). He concludes that culture and religion are always intimately linked because both religion and culture originate in the human creative self. Culture and religion are also connected because both require experiences that ‘are grounds for hope’ (Greeley, 1988, pg. 27). This is due to the operation of the creative imagination, which takes in all experiences without distinction between the sacred and the secular. The images perceived are brought together in such a way that,

No matter how hard the creator and consumer of culture may try, s/he cannot exclude religious experiences from the other experiences of life. Long before questions of meaning arise in the discursive self, the creative self is already playing its riotous game with images of the kinds of experiences that fill with hope - even before the discursive self has time to put the label ‘hope’ on the experiences (Greeley,

²⁰ Andrew Greeley, *God In Popular Culture* Chicago: The Thomas More Press, 1988), pg. 9.

1988, pg. 27).

Thus, art can be a *locus theologicus* or the space where the viewer can encounter God, or the things of God. Artist Damien Hirst's installation piece *A Thousand Years* (1990) is an example.



3. *A Thousand Years*

Hirst is not a practicing Christian.²¹ However, he is obsessed with the ‘deep profundities of life and death.’²² The work is intended to provoke contemplation regarding how a person is to approach death. The work portrays the cyclical and inevitable process of life as it gives way to death and vice-versa. Hirst integrates the decomposition of the cow head with the concept of *rebirth* through the existence of tens of thousands of insects. The perforated glass plane which divides the work in half is intended to suggest that death can occur at any moment, ‘as shown by the possibility of insects entering either compartment at random.’²³

What is the viewer's attitude to be to this inevitable and entirely final event called death?

Hirst said of the work, ‘You can frighten people with death or an idea of their own mortality,

²¹ Jonathan Jones, “Damien Hirst: ‘I was a Catholic until I was 12. I loved the imagery - the blood,’” *The Irish Times* 25 February, 2021. During the interview with Jones, Hirst confessed, ‘I was a Catholic until I was 12. Then my parents got divorced and my mum left the church. I loved the imagery: the blood. But bring in God, and I turn into a scientist and say there is no God.’ <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/art-and-design/visual-art/damien-hirst-i-was-a-catholic-until-i-was-12-i-loved-the-imagery-the-blood-1.4491576>; accessed 27 December, 2023.

²² “A Thousand Years (1990) by Damien Hirst,” *ARTCHIVE*, 2023; <https://www.artchive.com/artwork/a-thousand-years-damien-hirst-1990/>; accessed 22 November, 2023.

²³ *Ibid.*

or it can actually give them vigour.’²⁴ In other words, contemplation of the cycle of life to death may either frighten the viewer with the realization of their own impending departure from this life, or it may energize them to make the most of their life here and now. Both, or either, reaction may occur.

Can this piece be a medium for fullness or the experience of fullness? It would seem so. Hirst implicitly invokes a theme important in Christianity - and many other religious traditions - that is explored many times in the Wisdom literature of the Christian Bible.²⁵ Thus, Hirst’s viewers could be directed to consider the meaning and value of life here on earth, i.e., what it might mean to flourish. Moreover, the gaze of the viewer could also be lifted to a higher plane in which questions arise, such as ‘Is this *all* there is to life?’ The viewer may contemplate, ‘If Hirst is correct, does there not exist a higher, more profound version of life, something more than simply living and dying?’ ‘What makes for a meaningful life in the face of inevitable death?’ The work may lift the eyes of the viewer higher. It offers an opportunity to contemplate a reality beyond the ordinary, the prospect of death and the personal consideration of a response. Moreover, the work may summon the viewer, by implication, to consider the transcendent God during this lifetime.

Other modern works were created to affirm ordinary life, but also to point the viewer beyond themselves to something higher and more profound. One such work is *Shadows Travelling on the Sea of the Day*, by Olafur Eliasson (2022).²⁶

²⁴ Withrefdeath, “Damien Hirst - A Thousand Years,” *With Reference To Death*, 25 May, 2015; <http://withreferencetodeath.philippocock.net/blog/hirst-damien-a-thousand-years/>; accessed 22 November, 2023. See also: Galerie d’Orsay / Damien Hirst. <https://www.galerie-dorsay.com/damienhirst>; accessed 22 November, 2023.

²⁵ See Proverbs 1:2-3: ‘To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity.’

²⁶ The work resides in the desert outside of Doha, Qatar. It features 20 mirrored circle shelters that are ‘an invitation to resync with the planet.’ As viewers move within the installation, they see both themselves and the environment reflected back to them. The intention is that the work would encourage the viewers to contemplate their unique place on Earth. The piece was part of a project by Qatar Museums commissioned the project for its public space in preparation for the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar; <https://www.archdaily.com/991282/olafur-eliassons-site-specific-installation-shadows-travelling-on-the-sea-of-the-day-opens-in-doha-qatar>. Accessed 10 September, 2023.



4. *Shadows Travelling on the Sea of the Day*

Eliasson's intention in the work is for the viewer to have a transcendent experience in which they feel connected to the grander world they inhabit. He says of the work,

It is a kind of reality check of your connectedness to the ground. You are at once standing firmly on the sand and hanging, head down, from a ground that is far above you. You will probably switch back and forth between a first-person perspective and a destabilizing, third-person point of view of yourself...It is a celebration of everything being in and moving through the desert site north of Doha at the time of your visit – animals, plants, and human beings; stories, traditions, and cultural artefacts; wind, sunlight, air, and shimmering heat.²⁷

Matthew Burgos²⁸ notes that the use of mirrors allows the viewers to see themselves in the work, thereby becoming a vital part of the piece. It is the viewer's own participation in the work that allows,

Somehow, the viewers come in contact with themselves as their surroundings heighten their senses. They live in the present, they soak in the moment, they are invited – encouraged even – to drown out the noise and be in nature.

In other words, it is in this way that the viewer enters a space to contemplate their being in the moment. The work is intended to function in the same way that Taylor describes the effect of an experience of fullness: to 'help us rise up to be the kind of person we desire to be' (Taylor, 2007, pg. 5). The work poses the questions to the individual viewer, 'Who am I in the world?' 'In what framework do I apprehend my identity?' 'Who am I to be relative to the

²⁷ Shawn Ghassemitari, "Olaf Eliasson Unveils New Installation in Qatar," *HypeArt*, 27 October, 2022, <https://hypebeast.com/2022/10/olafur-eliasson-shadows-travelling-on-the-sea-of-the-day-qatar-museums>; accessed 27 December, 2023.

²⁸ Matthew Burgos, "Shadows Traveling On The Sea Of The Day By Olaf Eliasson," *DesignBloom*, 26 October, 2022; <https://www.designboom.com/art/olafur-eliasson-installation-qatar-creates-illusion-10-26-2022/>; accessed 27 December, 2023.

situations in the world today?’ ‘What moral stance(s) must I take in response?’ The piece was created to facilitate such moments of contemplation for the viewer.

1.5 *The Good Life?*

This chapter has been driving toward the question that Taylor poses in *Sources of the Self*: What constitutes the good life? Moreover, how is it obtained? As demonstrated above, for Taylor, the good life depends on our understanding of The Good.

Why is it necessary to *talk* about the good? Taylor introduces the concept of *constitutive good* or *life goods* (Taylor, 1989, pg. 93). The importance of the consistent use of the term constitutive is its ability to denote reality-making. For Taylor, the constitutive good *makes real* the good life, because it has been articulated. Constitutive language allows a person to know something *as it is*, i.e., experientially, realistically or phenomenologically. At this point, talk of the good is what provides the impetus for the good to be a moral source.

Taylor will build on the concept of the constitutive good and the concept of constitutive language in a later work, *The Language Animal* (2016).²⁹ We will explore the concept of constitutive language as it relates to *expressivism* in more detail in the next chapter. Here we examine Taylor’s concept of constitutive language as it relates to art as a medium for fullness.

Therefore, I maintain that two aspects are important. First is the idea that constitutive language makes a thing real through articulation. This is what art and works of art can do: they can articulate and manifest concepts and realities for contemplation by the viewer. Art is constitutive language. The second important aspect is that the human *telos* is not so much about acknowledging the good, but rather, it is about being good or virtuous. Virtuous living

²⁹ Charles Taylor, *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, UK: Belknap, 2016).

produces a full life worth living. It is to this end that the experience of art, and thus an experience of fullness through works of art, can direct a person. As Taylor acknowledges, ‘Experiencing fullness can help us rise to be the kind of person we desire to be’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 5). Art can articulate and manifest concepts and realities. Therefore, art can be a medium in which a portrait of the good can be presented for the viewer to contemplate. If the viewer is open to what the piece is communicating, then an experience of the good, and fullness may happen.

1.6 *The Jewish-Christian Promise*

In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor offers a way of ‘mapping out the “various facets of the modern identity.”’ As Ian Fraser notes, Taylor’s attempt is not to be prescriptive regarding the solutions to the modern search for identity; rather Taylor’s project is to explain the moral sources that served to construct the modern self.³⁰ In *Sources of the Self* Taylor attempts to remain in the realm of the modern philosophical discourse, as he will also do in *A Secular Age*. He is aware that being explicit with his own theistic or theological perspective may incite some readers to dismiss his case outright. He desires a wide range of readers, irrespective of each one’s worldview or beliefs.³¹ However, Fraser also notes, in Taylor’s closing statement in *Sources of the Self*, Taylor reveals his perspective and is explicit that, in his view, the moral source he would argue for is Jewish-Christian theism. According to Taylor, it is this worldview which defines and explains transcendence and its relationship to a life of fullness and flourishing, individually and in a society. It is Jewish-Christian theism, according to Taylor, that can truly make for a better world due to its ‘central promise of a

³⁰ Ian Fraser, “Charles Taylor on Transcendence,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2003, pg., [297-314], 298.

³¹ Ibid., 298. Fraser refers to Taylor’s comments in *A Catholic Modernity?* pg. 13: ‘They [theistic beliefs] have been reflected in my philosophical work, but not in the same form as I raise them this afternoon, because of the nature of philosophical discourse (as I see it anyway), which has to try to persuade honest thinkers of any metaphysical or theological commitments.’

divine affirmation of the human, more total than humans can ever attain unaided. But to explain this properly would take another book' (Taylor, 1989, pg. 521). Taylor is even more clear that his preferred moral source is the God of Abraham, as God offers, for Taylor, the best account of life in the world.³² Thus, Taylor opens the door for his story to be heard in a Christian register.

That is the tack that this dissertation will also take: the best account of the pursuit of the good can guide a person to the Christian narrative. It can orientate a person toward transcendence, or the Transcendent, which in Taylor's theism is the God of Abraham and the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, it is precisely in this direction that I want to take Taylor a step further. Taylor wants to leave the reader in the place of considering what the good and the prospects for the good life may entail. I affirm his thesis and how he has constructed his argument to this point. This dissertation will follow Taylor and attempt to 'map out' a path that extends beyond an abstract notion of the good, or the good life, through the attainment of moral sources. Rather, I want to propose a theological path to the possibility of experiencing the transcendent God.

However, this is getting ahead of our presentation. What can be said at this point is that *Sources of the Self* lays the groundwork for the concept of fullness, as articulated in *A Secular Age*, by demonstrating what makes for the good life. This trajectory will be completed in *A Secular Age*.

³² Charles Taylor, "Charles Taylor Replies" in Tully (ed.), *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 226-227, referenced in Baker, 166. Taylor is unambiguous as to his preferred moral source: God. 'My account does give a kind of primacy to our moral and spiritual experience. Someone will believe in the God of Abraham because God figures in his/her best account. I believe in God, because I sense something which I want to describe as God's love and affirmation of the world, and human beings... What I believe in is what figures in my best account of the world, history, and my experience as a moral and spiritual being, but what figure in this account are experience-transcendent things... Again, I speak of "my" best account, but this may just as easily be "our" account.' See, Charles Taylor, "Charles Taylor Replies" in Tully (ed.), *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 226-227, referenced in Baker, 166.

2 *A Secular Age*

2.1 *Feeling the Secular Age*

Taylor's primary question in *A Secular Age* is, '[W]hy was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?' (Taylor, 2007, pg. 25). Why is the new default option unbelief? Why is belief such a highly contested and contestable option? Moreover, how does a person experience fullness in this situation? To answer these questions, Taylor insists that he must tell a story. He writes, 'the whole discussion has to tack back and forth between the analytical and the historical,' 'this is why the narrative is not an optional extra, why I believe that I have a story to tell' (Taylor, 2007, pg. 29). James K.A. Smith notes³³ that an equally important question asked by Taylor is,

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 default option? (Taylor, 2007, pg. 14).

Taylor asks how we *moved* from one condition to the other, hence the need to tell a story, a narrative of sorts.

Taylor's story climaxes by describing life lived as *exclusive humanism* in the immanent frame – the world picture in which we find ourselves, whether we recognize this as reality or not. The immanent frame consists in a version of the secular called Secularity 3. It is characterized by malaise, cross-pressures and the fragilization of faith.

Inhabiting the secular age is an existential experience. One doesn't necessarily *understand* living in a secular age, as much as one *feels* it. Smith observes this when he proposes that *A Secular Age* needs to be read 'almost like a novel.' Smith concludes, 'This is because ultimately Taylor wants to try to communicate what it *feels* like to live in a secular

³³ James K.A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), pg. 18.

age, what it *feels* like to inhabit the cross-pressured space of modernity.³⁴ Smith then cites Colin Jager to the same effect, ‘Jager thus reformulates Taylor’s question in light of his methodology: “What does secularity feel like from the inside?”’³⁵ It is these cross-pressured feelings, the feelings of malaise and meaninglessness experienced by many people in the modern secular culture that prompt the question, ‘How can a person experience fullness in this secular age?’

Critics of Taylor resist his interpretation of the current cultural context and ask, ‘Is our time truly a secular age?’ James Miller argues against Taylor’s construction and believes that we are not at all in a secular age. He refers to many studies and statistics that would point to the opposite conclusion, that we live in a religious age. However, Miller has misread Taylor. Miller stopped his analysis of Taylor at Secularity 2, the decline of personal belief. He missed Taylor’s analysis of *Secularity 3*, in which every belief is contestable, not that religion or spirituality has somehow disappeared. This is clearly not the case. Taylor is a pluralist; he recognizes and welcomes the plethora of possible faith options. Miller misses Taylor’s primary point - that we are living not in a godless age but in an age in which belief in God is a contested notion.³⁶

Austin Ruse, for the same reasons, also denies that ours is a secular age. He writes, ‘The story told by the elite that this is [a] secular age is quite frankly nonsense.’³⁷ He also suggests the pervasiveness of religious beliefs in contemporary Western culture. Miller and Ruse are correct in one sense. Our current situation has quite a proliferation of religious beliefs; ours is not a godless age by any means. However, if they are in some way responding

³⁴ Ibid., pg. 24.

³⁵ Ibid., pg. 24, from Colin Jager, “This Detail in History: Charles Taylor’s Romanticism,” in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), pg. 173.

³⁶ James Miller, “What Secular Age?” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Dec., 2008, Vol 21, No. ¼, pgs. 5-10.

³⁷ Austin Ruse, “Ours Is Not A Secular Age,” *Under Siege: No Better Time To Be A Faithful Catholic* (Manchester: Crisis Publications, 2021), pg. 91.

to Taylor, then they are misreading Taylor. For Taylor, Secularity 3 is not the elimination of God but rather the *contestability* of all beliefs.

Bishop Robert Barron suggests that, following the Biblical authors, the contemporary context does not trade in the categories of *religion* and *secular*. There exists no such thing as ‘pure secularism.’ The actual categories are those who worship the true God and those who indulge in idolatry or false worship. The *summum bonum*, is a person, object or activity that is established as an idol in the person’s life and is effectively being worshipped.³⁸

Alister McGrath speaks of atheism rather than secularism. He offers a definition of atheism: ‘Atheism, in the modern sense, has come to mean the explicit denial of all spiritual powers and supernatural beings, or the demand for the elimination of the transcendent as an illusion.’³⁹ His thesis suggests that the modern project of atheism (from the French Revolution to the fall of the Berlin Wall) is waning and a new era of religious thought and devotion is rising in the West. What will replace Western atheism? We shall have to wait and see (McGrath, 2004, pg. 279). This aligns well with Taylor’s proposition of Secularity 3: The contemporary situation is not godless; rather, all ideologies are contested and contestable.

2.2 Secularity 3

‘What does it mean to say that we live in a secular age?’ These are the opening words of *A Secular Age*. By ‘we’ Taylor means those who live in the North Atlantic world, although he acknowledges that secularity in various forms exists in different ways in different parts of the world. Taylor posits three types of secularity, which he designates as Secularity 1, Secularity 2, and Secularity 3. These types of secularity are to be understood, according to

³⁸ Bp. Robert Barron, ‘The Most Important Decision in Life,’ *Imprimis* vol. 52, no. 6, June 2023. Barron delivered this speech at the Commencement Ceremony at Hillsdale College, May 23, 2023.

³⁹ Alister McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World* (London: Rider, 2004), xii.

Taylor, in terms of ‘public spaces’ or ‘various spheres of activity – economic, political, cultural, educational, professional, recreational’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 2).

Taylor defines Secularity 1 (Taylor, 2007, pg. 2) as ‘this emptying of religion from autonomous social spheres.’ This situation contrasts with previous ‘archaic societies’ in which the distinction between religion and ‘political, economic, social, etc., aspects’ of society make no sense. This is not to suggest that people within the society no longer believe in God. Secularity 1 is the condition whereby the ‘norms and principles we follow, the deliberations we engage in, generally don’t refer us to God or to any religious beliefs.’ This removal of reference to God in the social spheres does not necessarily indicate that ‘the vast majority of people’ no longer believe in God. Rather, Taylor suggests it remains possible that this vast majority are ‘practising their religion vigorously.’ He offers the United States as an example: it was one of the first societies to officially separate church and state, yet it remains, statistically, one of the most religious. In other words, a person may have a personally vibrant religious faith while at the same time God is removed from the public sphere.

Secularity 2 ‘consists in the falling off of religious belief and practice, in people turning away from God, and no longer going to Church,’ even if the public spheres retain some references to God. Life becomes *a*-religious. The countries of Western Europe provide an example of this second sense of secularity (Taylor, 2007, pg. 2). Secularities 1 and 2 are fueled by *subtraction stories*. These are stories that suggest that the secular is simply the natural and inevitable result of the subtraction of religious belief and/or God from the metanarrative. Thus, if we dismiss the religious myths of the enchanted world, then, of course, what remains is ‘the secular’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 26). Taylor explains,

A common “subtraction” story attributes everything to disenchantment. First, science gave us “naturalistic” explanation of the world. And then people began to look for alternatives to God. But things didn’t work that way. The new mechanistic science of the seventeenth century wasn’t seen as necessarily threatening to God. It was to the enchanted universe and magic. It also began to pose a problem for particular providences.

Taylor refutes this theory. He argues that the secular is a ‘constructed’ narrative. Millbank notes that this is a ‘crucial point’ for Taylor’s argument. He writes, ‘[A]theist positions are not usually entertained merely with sad resignation but positively embraced as attractive and heroic life-stances.’⁴⁰ McGrath agrees; summarizing the rise of 18th-century atheism he writes, ‘The wisdom of the day was as simple as it was powerful: eliminate God, and a new future would dawn’ (McGrath, 2004, pg. 22).

Taylor’s focus, however, is Secularity 3. Secularity 3 focuses on the *conditions of belief*. The question is not so much *what* a person believes but rather *why* they believe it. The shift to Secularity 3 is a move from a society in which belief in God is unchallenged and, indeed unproblematic to one in which belief in God is one option among many possible options. Benschop points out that secularization ‘usually refers to the decline of religious belief and practice. But unbelief first has to become an option before it can be actualized’ and that is why Taylor goes after the changes in these conditions (Benschop, 2009, pg. 143). Secularity is not synonymous with unbelief; it is more about the contestability of belief and the interpretive horizon that makes this shift possible. True, for many secular people, faith or belief in God is never considered a viable option. Secularity 3, therefore, is characterized by the conscious choice of doubt and/or unbelief, or faith and belief, or any number of combinations of possible beliefs and choices.

I may find it inconceivable that I would abandon my faith, but there are others, including possibly some very close to me, whose way of living I cannot in all honesty just dismiss as depraved, or blind, or unworthy, who have no faith (at least in God or the transcendent) (Taylor, 2007, pg. 3).

Contestability is thus the key concept. Religion, or faith in God, has not necessarily disappeared; it is simply no longer the default option. Religion and faith are contested by many and various rivals: some people will believe, others will feel compelled to renounce

⁴⁰ John Millbank, ‘A Closer Walk On The Wild Side: Some Comments on Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age*,’ *Studies In Christian Ethics*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2009), pg. 92.

their faith, while for still others, faith is never even a possibility. ‘Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 3).

This sense of secularity is most significant as it provides ‘the whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious experience and search takes place’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 3). In other words, whether a person recognizes the reality of Secularity 3 or not, it is the condition of the inhabited world. It is, perhaps, like a snow globe – the holiday ornament consisting of a model of a scene within a glass dome filled with water and white particles that, when shaken, mimic a snowstorm. The figurines in the globe are embedded in a world of artificial snow (Secularity 3) that surrounds, envelops and defines them: they inhabit a *snow* globe. The *snow* is a given, unexamined feature of the world of the snow globe. Taylor will liken this condition to the background, the tacitly held, taken-for-granted framework in the Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Polanyi tradition (Taylor, 2007, pg. 13).⁴¹ Thus ‘An age or society would then be secular or not, in virtue of the conditions of experience of and search for the spiritual’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 3). There may exist vibrant faith, and conscious disbelief; doubt or indifference, or many possible combinations of beliefs and choices.

However, Taylor’s rationale for focusing on Secularity 3 is not to discuss belief or unbelief as theoretical, but to draw attention to people’s lived experience (Taylor, 2007, pgs. 4-5),

I want to talk about belief and unbelief, not as rival *theories*, that is, ways that people account for existence, or morality, whether by God, or by something in nature, or whatever. Rather what I want to do is focus attention on the different kinds of lived experience involved in understanding your life in one way or another, on what it’s like to live as a believer or an unbeliever.

⁴¹ Taylor and Dreyfus will use Wittgenstein’s picture metaphor in greater depth in chapter one of *Retrieving Realism* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2015). This time ‘the picture’ refers to ‘the modern epistemological tradition, which begins with Descartes.’ As with secularity 3, the picture is more than simply a theory: ‘It is a largely unreflected-upon background understanding which provides the context for, and influences all our theorizing in, this area’ (1).

It is in this context of lived space that Taylor will explore the idea of fullness. Secularity 3 can thus be characterized by several presuppositions: 1) Faith is now one option among many 2) Belief in God is no longer a given; faith is no longer the default public opinion 3) For some, faith is not even imaginable or plausible 4) Some people have made a conscious choice of doubt or unbelief in God, or a combination of possible beliefs are synthesized 5) For some, faith can even appear unattractive 6) Belief in God is a contested narrative, and 7) Transcendence is not necessary to experience a full life.

Therefore, I maintain that Secularity 3 is a shared space of meaning of what could be true. It is defined by what is intersubjective, as shared experience or knowledge. As will be demonstrated in later chapters of this study, works of art can function in much the same way; they can be a medium for the sharing of subjectivity.

2.3 *The Enchanted World Versus the Disenchanted World*

Premodern people lived in what Taylor calls an *enchanted world*. Taylor here invokes a ‘negation’ of ‘Weber’s expression “disenchantment” as a description of our modern condition’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 25).⁴² Taylor explains his use of *enchanted* (Taylor, 2007, pg. 446),

This is obviously borrowing from Max Weber, and introducing the antonym to his term ‘disenchanted.’ In an enchanted world there is a strong contrast between sacred and profane. By the sacred I mean certain places: like churches, certain agents: priests, certain times: high feasts, certain actions: saying the Mass, in which the divine or the holy is present. As against these, other places, persons, times, actions count as profane.

The *enchanted world* was the world inhabited by our ancestors. It is the world of ‘spirits, demons and moral forces’ which impinged upon life in the material world (Taylor, 2007, pg. 26). Sacramental power resided in this world, meaning power resided in things such as

⁴² Max Weber, ‘Science as a Vocation,’ in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. And ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pgs., 155, 139. ‘The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and above all by “the disenchantment of the world,” whereby “we” find ourselves generally persuaded that “there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation.’

candles, relics, or the Eucharistic Host (Taylor, 2007, pg. 32). Sacred items were charged with divine power (Taylor, 2007, pg. 35). Thus certain places (i.e., churches and shrines), certain agents (i.e., priests), certain times (i.e., high feasts) and certain actions (i.e., prayers, the Mass) provided loci for the presence of God not found in the ordinary. The reality of the presence of God within certain spaces of life in the world was accepted as normative by everyone (Taylor, 2007, pg. 446).

Disenchantment, therefore, is the process whereby these elements of the enchanted world disappear, and ‘the *substitution* of what we live today’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 29). The key to Taylor’s thesis is the observation that between 1500 and 2000 a change has occurred, a shift in understanding of fullness – ‘a condition in which our highest spiritual and moral aspirations point us inescapably to God’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 26). These aspirations in many ways make no sense without God, and can now be found, and ‘frequently are referred to sources which deny God.’ But the ‘fading of God’s presence’ – as he acted in the cosmos, founding and sustaining societies and acting as a bulwark against evil – caused people to look to other possible sources for fullness (Taylor, 2007, pg. 26).

Taylor introduced the idea of the plurality of moral sources in *Sources of the Self*. Here, he builds on that concept. If there exists a plurality of moral sources, then there may exist a plurality of sources of fullness. In other words, as the story of the presence of God faded, humanity was left without a ‘necessary objective pole’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 26) for our highest moral and spiritual aspirations. We no longer looked to God for fullness or a meaningful life. This will open the way for, but did not yet produce, what Taylor will call *exclusive humanism* (Taylor, 2007, pg. 26).

Considering Taylor’s thesis of the Enchanted World versus the Disenchanted World, it is important to remember that Taylor is descriptive. The disenchantment of the world is the construal of the modern secular world; this is the way the modern world is viewed and

engaged by modern secular people. However, given Taylor's thesis, a person could believe the world is not so disenchanted. The presence of God remains a plausible belief. It is through the experience of art that the artist desires to share this plausible belief. Suzi Gablik speaks of "reenchanting" our whole culture' through the reenchancement of art. By this she means 'stepping beyond' the thoughts, values and framework of the Enlightenment. What is needed is a new paradigm that 'allows for the return of soul.'⁴³ Gablik is helpful here. The project of art relative to disenchanted Secularity 3 is not to return our culture to Medieval paradigms. Not every aspect of the premodern world needs to be embraced (Do relics contain divine power? Is black bile the cause of melancholy?). Rather, what is needed, as Gablik posits, is a situation which makes room for *soul*. Reenchantment, for Gablik, is a mode of life free from the affliction of nihilism. This sounds quite like Taylor's concepts of fullness and a life worth living. Gablik and Taylor seem to be moving in the same trajectory.

Therefore, I maintain that the over-arching worldview of the premodern era is true: God is present in the immanent world. There exist spaces in which he is present within the world. Therefore, it is argued by this study that art and the aesthetic are one of those spaces or realms. As George Steiner writes regarding the presence of God in the artworld: that all human communication through language and the arts is, by necessity, 'underwritten by the assumption of God's presence.'⁴⁴ His wager is that human communication through the arts is meaningful due to the presence of the transcendent God in that space. This concept will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

⁴³ Suzi Gablik, *The Reenchantment of Art*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), pg. 11.

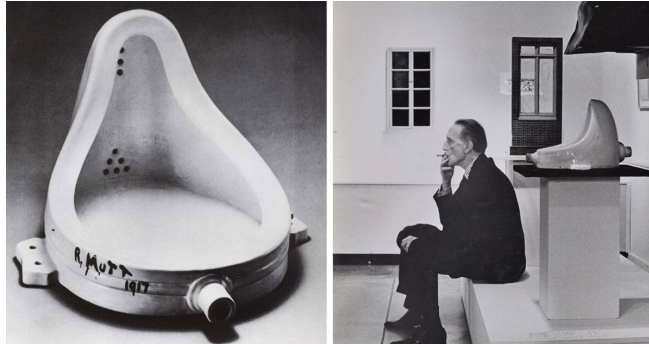
⁴⁴ George Steiner, *Real Presences*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pg. 3. Steiner writes, 'I will put forward the argument that the experience of aesthetic meaning in particular, that of literature, of the arts, of musical form, infers the necessary possibility of this "real presence."'

3 Art and Contestability in *Secularity 3*

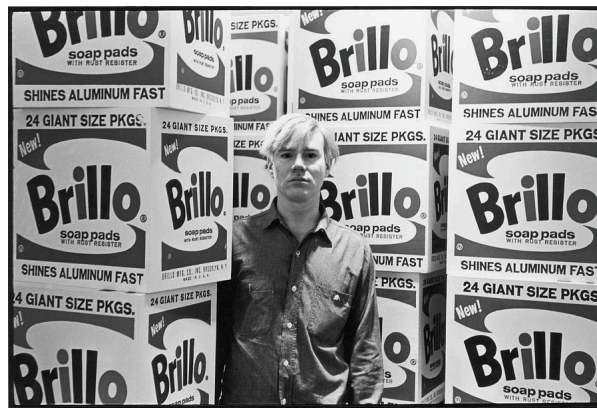
If Taylor's primary point that *Secularity 3* is characterized not so much by the disappearance of God, but rather by the contestability of beliefs, then modern art has paralleled and reflected this concept in the twentieth century. From the chaos of Dada and the *ready-mades* of Marcel Duchamp, through the action paintings of Jackson Pollock and the Pop Art of Andy Warhol, to the installations of Tracey Emin, modern art has specialized in trading on the concept of contestability. Dada contested the ideas of beauty inherited from the 19th Century. For Dadaism, World War 1 shattered the idea that moderns understood what beauty consisted of.⁴⁵ Duchamp is considered the grandfather of modern art. He contested the idea that beauty must be a defining characteristic of works of art by submitting a urinal as a work for the exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists (1917).⁴⁶ Pollock wanted to share his feelings by splashing his canvasses with paint; Warhol contested the consumerism of the age by mass-producing portraits and copies of ordinary items like soup cans and Brillo boxes. Tracey Emin reproduced her soiled bed as a work that shared with the world an episode of depression she had suffered. While each artist employed their craft to argue for their view of the world, the cumulative body of work in twentieth-century modern art shouted to the viewing world that, from the perspective of the artists, the modern world - and all the worldviews and ideologies it offers - is, if nothing else, contestable.

⁴⁵ Dorothy Brill, *Shock and Senselessness in Dada and Fluxus* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2010), pg. 59.

⁴⁶ Michelle Kamhi, *Who Says That's Art?* (New York: Pro Arte Books, 2014), pg. 80.



5. Marcel Duchamp and *Fountain* (1917)



6. Andy Warhol and *Brill Boxes* (1964)

4 Conclusion: Moving Forward in Mission in Secularity 3

This chapter attempted to identify the problem and the questions that provide the philosophical context of the experience of fullness within the secular age. It examined the primary themes from the bookends *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age*. It demonstrated that Taylor began his philosophical argument by examining what constituted the good and the good life. A person's identity must include an understanding of the good. Taylor is in Aristotelian space here. Inescapable frameworks are the often unnoticed and unchallenged background that shapes an understanding of the good. A person's identity is formed by the stories we tell ourselves. Ordinary life becomes a space in which questions of God can be asked, and God can be encountered. The promise of the good life is implicitly found in a Christian worldview. Taylor is moving toward his notion of fullness.

What does it mean to live in a secular age? We are no longer in the Enchanted World. We find ourselves in the third iteration of secularity. Secularity 3 focuses on the *conditions of belief*, and *why* a person believes what they do. Western society has moved from a context in which belief in God is unchallenged and unproblematic, to one in which belief in God is one option among many possible options. Every worldview or perspective of life is contestable. This is Taylor's description of the way people in the world see reality and the philosophical context for the discourse regarding the experience of fullness.

Over the span of several decades Taylor has displayed concern about how a person can obtain a fully realized life. His consistent motif was to offer an analysis and evaluation of the modern social and cultural situation in order to offer a philosophical proposal of human flourishing. The language and concepts developed from the pursuit of the good life to self-transcendence to the experience of fullness.

In this chapter, we reviewed this analysis and evaluation from a very broad perspective, seeking to highlight the themes in these works that set the context for an examination of the experience of fullness. We are not yet there. In the next chapter, we will examine some of the specific characteristics of the secular age found within what Taylor calls the immanent frame and how these factors contribute to the search for fullness.

The Immanent Frame: The Role Art Came to Play

The previous chapter examined Taylor's descriptive portrait of the modern, secular context. The objective of this chapter is to identify the factors that contribute to identifying the question and the problem I want to address and to understand the role art came to play in the search for the experience of fullness. To do this, we will look at some of the specific characteristics of the secular age found within what Taylor calls the immanent frame and how these factors contribute to the search for fullness. Moreover, it will be necessary to identify aspects of the immanent frame which can draw attention to how art can be a medium for the experience of fullness. The most significant aspects of this study are: the concept of immanence, the buffered self, the age of authenticity, expressive individualism, the modern problem of malaise as a cultural contagion, and the quest for meaning. It is essential to acknowledge that this is how those in the modern world, specifically the North Atlantic world, as Taylor defines it (Taylor, 2007, pg. 1). The mission of the Church, and the artist begins by recognizing and accepting these facts on the ground, meaning it is in this contemporary situation that artists make art.⁴⁷

The concept of the immanent frame is significant for this study due to what could be termed its Romantic impulse, i.e., the unpremeditated inclination to focus on the individual. William Dyrness calls our situation 'post-Romantic.'⁴⁸ For Taylor, the Romantic period was an impassioned protest against the rational and disengaged approach to life. The human person has lost a sense of humanness by becoming a cog in the modern machine. People could no longer realize their fullest, or ideal life in a mechanized, consumerist wasteland.

⁴⁷ See William A. Dyrness, *The Facts on the Ground: A Wisdom Theology of Culture* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022).

⁴⁸ William A. Dyrness, *Poetic Theology: God and the Poetics of Everyday Life*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), pg., 25.

What was needed was a recovery of what truly made a person feel fully human: creativity, innocence and exaltation of the interior, emotional self. Feelings, experience, beauty and expression become the driving and defining forces of human life. Therefore, the Romantic impulse is the striving to recover the unique humanness of individual human beings.

Romantics sought to recover an ancient innocence and live into that which makes a person alive and attuned to their world.

This chapter concludes that art constitutes an excellent response to the realities of the immanent frame because a primary characteristic of the frame is its Romantic impulse or our post-Romantic situation. Art became the exterior expression of the depth of human subjectivity or interiority. It is what Taylor calls a *subtler language* than rationalism and discourse. Art may offer epiphanies of the great moral truths in the world. Therefore, art may be considered a privileged medium in the quest for meaning within the immanent frame because of the Romantic emphasis on art and, therefore, is a medium for the experience of fullness.

1 The Immanent Frame

1.1 Immanence: Open or Closed 'Takes'

The immanent frame is Taylor's term for the context in which moderns find themselves. It is constituted by several key characteristics: immanence, the buffered self, the age of authenticity and expressive individualism, the onset of malaise as the cultural emotion and the quest for meaning. These together form the barrier, the impingement to the human experience of fullness. Should a person attempt to experience fullness, the quest is pursued within this frame.

James K.A. Smith accesses the metaphor of the immanent frame: 'This is a metaphorical concept - alluding to a "frame" that both boxes in *and* boxes out - and it is

meant to capture the world we now inhabit in our secular age.⁴⁹ In other words, the modern secular world is construed as a world-in-a-box. It is a picture limited by its ‘frame.’ Taylor explains that the immanent frame ‘constitutes a “natural” order, to be contrasted to a “supernatural” one, an “immanent” world, over against a possible “transcendent” one’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 542). This order is impersonal; it is self-sufficient and can be understood without any reference to God. Thus, the immanent frame is not actually a *set of beliefs*, rather, the immanent frame is ‘the sensed context in which we develop our beliefs; but in the same way, one or another of these “takes” on the immanent frame, as open or closed, has usually sunk to the level of an unchallenged framework’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 549). A *take* is simply a select perspective. It is similar to what ‘Wittgenstein calls a picture, a background to our thinking...which is often largely unformulated, and to which we can frequently, just for this reason, imagine no alternative (Taylor, 2007, pg. 549).’⁵⁰ Therefore, the immanent frame is a structure in which the facets of life – ‘the scientific, social, technological, and so on’ – are all part of a ‘natural’ or ‘this-worldly’ framework. It is a framework ‘which can be understood in its own terms, without reference to the “supernatural” or the “transcendent”’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 594). This closed universe is now perceived to be ‘self-explanatory within material limits.’⁵¹

Therefore, I maintain that in the immanent frame, it is believed that there exists no need of outside forces to explain, understand, or meaningfully experience the world. One need not look elsewhere; the immanent world is descriptive of all that some people know

⁴⁹ James K.A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor*, pg. 92.

⁵⁰ Taylor will suggest the danger of the Wittgensteinian picture as the framework or background in *Retrieving Realism*, chapter 1, ‘A Picture Held Us Captive.’ Dreyfus and Taylor, *Retrieving Realism* (London, England and Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015): ‘To identify the picture would be to grasp a big mistake, something like a framework mistake, which distorts our understanding, and at the same time prevents us from seeing this distortion for what it is... We think Wittgenstein was right about this. There is a big mistake operating in our culture, a kind of operating (mis)understanding of what it is to know, which has had dire effects on both theory and practice in a host of domains’ (2).

⁵¹ Andrew Kirk, “A Secular Age in a Mission Perspective: A Review Article,” *Transformation* 28(3), 2011, pg. 177.

regarding reality. This leaves open the question of whether or not, on this reading of things, this world has any deeper significance and if so, does deeper significance refer to a transcendent Creator beyond it?

Yet, for some people the immanent frame remains *open*. According to Taylor, while the immanent frame is acknowledged, a *sense* of something ontologically higher, something of transcendence, ‘seems obviously right, founded, even undeniable’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 544). For many, some aspects of this life push them toward transcendence, whether or not a person is searching for it. For example, for some people, the sense of the highest good and the qualitative difference between virtue and vice can still originate from a religiously-informed background in which the good is inconceivable without God. However, even for the irreligious, the qualitative difference cannot always be accounted for solely within the limits of the immanent frame. The possibility of the highest good causes some people to ‘press towards some recognition of transcendence’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 544-545).

Therefore, I would suggest that this poses a question that religious (especially Christian) people may raise: If this view of things is incorrect, do we, as religious people, simply need to get people to see this and replace this view with a theistic worldview? Realistically, this is not a strategy worth pursuing because 1) it is imprudent since most secular-minded unbelievers will most likely dismiss it outright, and 2) in the end, it is not even possible, given that such background beliefs are simply taken for granted. This situation should be the starting point for the Church’s presentation of Christ and discipleship. Therefore, the strategy for the Christian who wishes to be missional or to help secular unbelievers move toward the Transcendent God is to find a way to bypass the frame, to penetrate to the interior of the secular unbeliever, in order to introduce them to fullness and transcendence.

In light of this, I would suggest two significant points exist regarding the immanent frame and art. First, as just mentioned, the search for fullness is pursued *within* the immanent frame. Transcendence must be experienced within the immanent frame. Christian mission must proceed from this perspective and thus ask, ‘How can we assist secular unbelievers to see past the frame? How can we, minimally, help secular unbelievers to have an open take on transcendence?’

Second, a question arises: Can art be a vehicle that alerts a person to the existence of transcendence within the immanent frame, especially a person with a closed take? It will be demonstrated later in this thesis that these are plausible responses because art is a *locus theologicus*. Art is a space in which the presence of the Transcendent God moves and operates. It will also be demonstrated that Thomist anthropology, humanity as *imago Dei*, posits that human beings as constituted are capable of such experiences through the medium of art.

1.2 *The Buffered Self*

The immanent frame describes a distinct version of the self, which is the buffered self. The buffered self is ‘an individual in our culture who is isolated from any transcendent reality, that is, God’s presence.’⁵² The disengaged, disciplined, buffered self is a central feature of Secularity 3 (Taylor, 2007, pg. 136). The buffered self is important for this thesis because this person, or self, has attempted to make the boundary between self and the other impenetrable. This is a ‘person [who] *accepts* a buffered condition as a means of being protected from the demonic or otherwise ominous forces’⁵³ which in the pre-modern age

⁵² Alan Hendrick, “The Buffered Self,” *Canaan’s Rest* 5 September, 2016; <http://canaansrest.org/the-buffered-self>; accessed 18 August, 2023.

⁵³ Alan Jacobs, “Fantasy and the Buffered Self: The genre offers re-enchantment without risk,” *The New Atlantis*, Winter 2014, <https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/fantasy-and-the-buffered-self>; accessed 17 August, 2023.

threatened all aspects of life. The buffered self attempts to shield itself from outside moral, spiritual or emotional influences. A buffered self attempts to isolate their interiority from that which is outside themselves. According to Bishop Robert Barron, this poses a problem, ‘This buffered existence makes evangelization nearly impossible, for it closes a listener to the proposal that true fulfilment and God are tightly linked together.’⁵⁴ It is this self that must be breached if a person is to experience fullness.

Taylor suggests that the buffered self is a product of the disenchantment of the world. This modern self, having denied the Transcendent, has created an effective boundary between mind and world and even mind and body. The modern buffered self is armed with a new confidence in the human powers of morally ordering the world. Morality and other meanings are in the mind. The buffered self makes a sharp distinction between inner and outer, what is in the mind and what is out there in the world. However, with this resistance a concern may arise within a buffered person that something might be missing, creating a sense of malaise, a sense that the disenchanted world is empty and flat. A search for meaning within the disenchanted world may be embarked upon, in hopes that something significant might be found. A quickly-growing category of people who can no longer accept orthodox Christianity are seeking spiritual alternatives (Taylor, 2007, pg. 302). Everyday life can feel empty and lacking. The eclipse of transcendence has fostered a lack of meaning, a thinness of life, and a vast array of spiritual alternatives. These alternatives increase the cross-pressures and the malaise rather than alleviate it. It is this buffered self that must be infiltrated if a person is to be once again open to transcendence.

However, I must pose a question at this point: Does this buffered self truly achieve its own aims of isolation? Several of Taylor’s interlocutors are helpful here.

⁵⁴ Bp. Robert Barron, “Blasting Holes Through the Buffered Self,” *Word on Fire*, March 1, 2016; <https://www.wordonfire.org/articles/barron/blasting-holes-through-the-buffered-self/>; accessed 22 July, 2023.

Fr. Robert Spitzer argues that it does not. The numinous experience is, in fact, common to all persons. Spitzer defines the numinous experience as ‘the interior presence of a mysterious, powerful, fascinating, daunting, and desirable “wholly other.” It is an innate “sense of the sacred.”’⁵⁵ Spitzer approaches the topic from the *subjective* and *interior* perspective - against objections that the inquiry should begin from the *objective* evidence of transcendence. He rejects this because what a person can understand of transcendence is directly involved in the ‘intuitive, emotional and interpersonal dimensions of consciousness.’⁵⁶

Spitzer addresses the possibility that subjective feelings of a transcendent Other could merely be the manifestations of what Spitzer calls hyperimagination or hypermotion that arise from completely natural causes. He grants that this assertion *may be* true. However, if this is the case, then how can we explain why 84% of the world is religious, why most world religions share seven common beliefs, or why every culture throughout history has believed in something ‘wholly Other?’ Why do the vast majority of cultures feel a call to worship? Why do people of every culture throughout history have a sense of sacred origins, places, times and history (Spitzer, 2015, pgs. 25-26)?

He explains the two poles of the numinous experience: 1) the elements of dread, awe, ‘dauntingness’ and ‘creatureliness’ that all persons feel in the presence of the wholly Other, on the one side, and 2) feelings that the numen is alluring, charming, fascinating, enchanting and attractive, on the other. Spitzer posits that ‘a large percentage of the world population has a sense of this presence’ of the wholly other proves that the experience of the transcendent, or numinous, is not a ‘figment of our individual imaginations’ (Spitzer, 2015, pg. 48).

⁵⁵ Fr. Robert Spitzer, S.J., *The Soul’s Upward Yearning: Clues to Our Transcendent Nature From Experience and Reason (Happiness, Suffering, and Transcendence)*, Volume 2 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015), pg. 18.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 21.

Therefore, I maintain that sometimes a person feels that they are being invited to draw closer to this Other. I agree with Spitzer that art can be such a vehicle that draws people when they open themselves to it. Thus, the numinous presence ‘becomes more deeply and intensely present to us. It is precisely these dimensions of human interiority that art impacts in the human person.’⁵⁷ Spitzer’s acceptance of the numinous experience seems to be aligned with Taylor’s concept of the open take on transcendence (Taylor, 2007, pg. 544), into which the experience of art offers a view.

Therefore, I also maintain, following Spitzer and against Barron, that the evangelization of the buffered self is not impossible. Rather, the buffered self is perhaps the ideal candidate for the experience of fullness and transcendence through the medium of art. The buffered self has expended effort to insulate itself from outside realities, be they moral, spiritual, or emotional. Yet, art, as will be demonstrated later, works from the inside out. Art can slip past a viewer’s cognitive defences because it first impacts the interiority of the viewer - his or her feelings, emotions, loves and intuitions - prior to cognition. The buffered self may then be caught unaware of a reality they desire to reject. As will be demonstrated later in this study, what remains now for the viewer of art is to cognitively accept or reject the communication from the work of art, both of which are possible. Moreover, even if the buffered self has no interest in transcendence, once fullness is experienced, the effects on the person can be overwhelming. The results could be a personal ‘Damascus Road’ experience for that individual.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid., pg. 48.

⁵⁸ A ‘Damascus Road’ experience refers the conversion experience of Saul of Tarsus recorded in the Book of Acts, chapter 9. When Saul was unexpectedly confronted by the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus he was so overwhelmed that he immediately converted to faith in Christ.

1.3 *The Age of Authenticity*

Within the immanent frame comes the arrival of the Age of Authenticity, and with its advent comes the Post-Romantic impulse. Taylor defines authenticity this way, '[E]ach one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from the outside' (Taylor, 2007, pg. 473). The defining characteristic of authenticity is personal choice. A person has the supreme right and moral duty to pursue the lifestyle that they feel will make them happy. This produced *expressivism*.

According to Taylor, expressivism becomes the foundation for a 'new and fuller individuation,' and thus a 'life worth living,' to use Taylor's terminology. Sociologist Robert Bellah, et al. speak in similar terms.⁵⁹ Bellah argues that the traditional values of self-sacrifice, empathy for the other, and altruism have given way to what he calls the 'first languages' of expressive individualism: self-actualization, self-esteem and self-acceptance.⁶⁰ Each individual is unique and original and of first importance. This sense of originality is to determine what a person should feel, believe, and value. From this sense of individuality derives the original path each person should take (Taylor, 1989, pg. 375).

Expressivism is certainly not new, Taylor points out, as it is the product of the Romantic period. 'What is new is that this kind of self-orientation seems to have become a mass phenomenon' (Taylor, 2007, pg. 473). William Dyrness summarizes this way: Every person now has the opportunity and right to express his or her own thoughts, values, beliefs

⁵⁹ Robert N. Bellah, William M. Sullivan, Richard Madsen, Steven Tipton, Ann Swidler *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Harper and Row, 1985), pg. viii.

⁶⁰ For Bellah, et. al., this attitude is 'therapeutic.' Self-sacrifice and giving of the self for the good of others is detrimental, even unhealthy, to the well-being of the individual's self. American individualism, according to Bellah, encourages individuals to 'find meaning exclusively in the private sphere,' not the public world of family or other important social configurations (viii). In expressive individualism, self-love and love of neighbor are mutually exclusive. The 'therapeutic ideal' can 'liberate' individuals, so that they 'can get in touch with their own wants and interests, freed from the artificial constraints of social roles, the guilt-inducing demands of parents and other authorities, and the false promises of illusionary ideals of love' (102). This is Taylor's emphasis as well.

and ‘style.’⁶¹ The rally cry for authenticity resounds, ‘Only accept what rings true to your own inner self’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 489). Each individual now has the freedom and means to define and realize his or her own definition of humanity and what it means to be human - what it means for a person to be his or her own authentic self. I suggest that the motto of the age could be: ‘Find yourself, realize yourself, release your true self.’ Expression becomes the way to realization and manifestation of a person’s sense of authenticity.

In Chapter One I mentioned another work by Taylor, *The Language Animal* (2016).⁶² In this work, Taylor argues that language does not simply describe reality or the world; rather it constitutes meaning. The expression and articulation of a human being shape and give meaning to experience and life. For Taylor, works of art function as a medium of constitutive expression which provides meaning. Taylor explains,⁶³

Art in all its forms has this extraordinary capacity [to manifest the inchoate, unformed and incommunicable], by giving expression to a feeling/vision which we never have (consciously and explicitly) had, to carry us to a new and unsuspected realm.

In other words, meaningfulness, a meaningful life requires ‘constitutive’ articulation, i.e., language.⁶⁴ We humans are such language animals who have need for such constitutive expression.

Therefore, I maintain that the authentic self, which is pursued and defined in modern secularism within the immanent frame, is *aesthetically* modulated. This exemplifies the heartbeat of Romanticism and leads us further toward the conclusion that art will play a significant role in the search for authenticity, meaning and fullness.

⁶¹ William A. Dyrness, *Poetic Theology: God and the Poetics of Everyday Life*, pg., 11.

⁶² Charles Taylor, *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (2016), pg. 247.

⁶³ Ibid., 247.

⁶⁴ Regarding the constitutive aspect of language Taylor adds on page 253: ‘[W]e explore the world of meaning (which is not simply an “inner world”) by probing it through constitutive enactments and expressions-articulations, which pan out or fail to convince...This second zone is the site of attempts to define and shape significance. Its expressions, be they enactments or verbal, in symbol [art] or philosophic prose, all aim to sketch some contour or facet of this overall shape of meaning, in the hope...of an ultimate ratification in felt intuition.’

The aesthetic articulation is also suggested by Abraham Maslow (1943). Maslow anticipated Taylor's analysis when he postulated what he called 'the hierarchy of needs.'⁶⁵ He was interested in what made people happy and how a person would pursue that happiness. The goal was to determine what constituted healthy individuals, and what a person needs or requires in order to be whole and to live a full life. The hierarchy is pyramid in shape. The bottom level, which represents the most basic human needs, describes physiological needs: food, water, breathing, and homeostasis. The next level up is Safety and Security; third is the need for love, which includes friendships and community; fourth is the need for esteem, which includes the need for a 'stable, firmly based (usually) high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem and for the esteem of others' (Maslow, 1943, pg. 381). The highest level of happiness is achieved in the need for self-actualization. Regarding self-actualization, Maslow writes (Maslow, 1943, pg. 382),⁶⁶

Even if all these needs are satisfied, we may still often (if not always) expect that a new discontent and restlessness will soon develop, unless the individual is doing what he is fitted for. A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualization.

Therefore, I maintain that two points about Maslow's thesis are worth noting. First, his examples of what a person needs for self-actualization are all from the Post-Romantic, expressivist arena: the musician, the artist and the poet who creates art. What the modern person must be, according to Maslow, is his or her Romantic and aesthetically modulated self.

Second, the highest and most important need is for a person to be his or her authentic self. This is perhaps the first time in history that the most important and necessary aspect of human life is self-actualization. For Maslow, a person should fulfil their own authenticity in

⁶⁵ Abraham Maslow "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review*, vol. 50, no. 4, (1943), 370-396.

⁶⁶ Maslow does acknowledge that the hierarchy is not a fixed order and can vary among different persons, but the basic premise holds. He writes, '*The degree of fixity of the hierarchy of basic needs.*—We have spoken so far as if this hierarchy were a fixed order but actually it is not nearly as rigid as we may have implied. It is true that most of the people with whom we have worked have seemed to have these basic needs in about the order that has been indicated. However, there have been a number of exceptions' (Maslow, 1943, pg. 386).

order to have a life worth living. Maslow, anticipating Taylor, has perfectly articulated the core of authenticity. Maslow and Taylor express parallel ideas: The search for this authentic self is the flowering of Romantic thought.

The Age of Authenticity and expressivism provide a philosophical context for art as a medium to experience fullness or transcendence. As will be discussed below, art became the primary vehicle for communicating the subjectivity of the artist in the Romantic period. If the question is, whether art can be a medium for the experience of fullness, then the Romantic answer is yes. Romantics might suggest it is the most privileged medium for the experience of fullness. Art can be a crucial sphere in which this quest was pursued by artists and viewers of art.

1.4 *The Malaises of Modernity*

Many modern secular people may be able to carry on in the immanent - perhaps even feel a new sense of invulnerability, a pride in the achievement of disenchantment - but the loss of the transcendent may leave a person *feeling* like something is missing. Taylor explains (Taylor, 2007, pg. 302),

The sense can easily arise that we are missing something, cut off from something, that we are living behind a screen... We can experience a sense of malaise, emptiness, and a need for meaning... I am thinking much more of a wide sense of malaise at the disenchanted world, a sense of it as flat, empty, a multiform search for something within, or beyond it, which could compensate for the meaning lost with transcendence; and this not only a feature of that time, but as one which continues into our own... My point is not that everybody feels this, but rather, first, that many do, and far beyond the ranks of card-carrying theists.

Not everyone feels this, of course, but many do, Taylor insists. He posits that a significant number of people are seeking alternative spiritual sources rather than orthodox religions. A spectrum exists, from orthodox religions on one hand through new age spiritualities to secular atheism on the other. A person may feel the tension of being pulled by a variety of often incompatible beliefs. This vacillation between the extreme lived positions demonstrates how unstable the modern situation can be.

‘Everyone understands the complaint that the disenchanted world lacks meaning’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 303), Taylor acknowledges. This lack of meaning and its attendant malaise is unique to the modern buffered identity. According to Taylor, this would have been unthinkable in Martin Luther’s day. Back then, the primary and unrelenting moral and spiritual problem was the question ‘Am I saved or damned?’ The modern buffered identity, in contrast, has attempted to insulate itself from the evil spirits and the moral forces of the enchanted world so that nothing can affect it. However, a consequence may be that, now, nothing significant will stand out for it. So, the closure can go both ways: nothing evil gets to me, but equally, nothing meaningful gets to me, either. A person may be insulated, but now, they are also isolated. Nothing or no one can hurt them, but neither can anything or anyone help them. The result is malaise, melancholy or ennui (Taylor, 2007, pg. 303).

Taylor suggests that the cultural experience is one that he calls *cross-pressures*, or the feeling(s) of being pulled in several directions simultaneously. The culture itself is ‘suspended between’ the two extremes of orthodox religion on one side and materialist atheism on the other, with each position offering conflicting narratives of the necessary and the good. The pressure is generated by the rejection of one side by the other. The secular narrative of the subtraction of God, the rejection of transcendence, and the immanent frame pulls a person in one direction, while being pulled in the opposite direction by the gnawing sense that the narrative can be woefully inadequate (Taylor, 2007, pg. 595). Cross-pressures are ‘a deep embedding in this identity...while at the same time a sense that something may be occluded in the very closures which guarantee this safety.’ Cross-pressures cause the fragility, or the fragilization of any particular formulation, ‘whether believing or unbelieving’ (Taylor, 2007, pg., 303).

Fragilization of faith occurs not because a plurality of faiths and faith options co-exist in the same place at the same time. Plurality was, and is a common situation. This pluralism,

or multiplicity of faiths has little effect as long as the other faith is ‘neutralized by the sense that being like them is not really an option for me.’ As long as the other faiths appear ‘strange and other, perhaps despised...too different, too weird, too incomprehensible,’ they will not challenge or undermine one’s faith (Taylor, 2007, pg. 303).

Moreover, when a person has contact with others, perhaps through friendship, family or marriage, he or she may see that other people are very much like themselves in many other areas: activities, professions, opinions and tastes. Through closer contact, even as members of the same community, a person may begin to see that others are not so different after all. The distance that may have kept people apart is not so far as perhaps first thought. Other questions may now arise for a person: ‘Why my way, and not hers?’ Is that person as incorrect as originally perceived? A person may then begin to question his or her assumptions, faith, or path in life. In this way, they may begin to feel the cross-pressures and the instability of the buffered identity. They may even consider change. They may begin to feel differently about themselves and their faith. Fragilization has occurred.

However, not everyone feels torn by such cross-pressures, perhaps not even a ‘most people’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 676). Many do not feel any pressures, cross or otherwise. Rather, Taylor employs the concepts in order to posit that any position by which a person situates him- or herself in the immanent frame is in some way defined, at least partly, in relation to the extreme to which they are drawn.

I maintain that Taylor’s assessment is essentially on target. However, Ruth Abbey⁶⁷ offers a critique of Taylor’s position. She notes that Taylor’s claim is that ‘the cross pressure defines the whole culture’ (Abbey, 2014, pg. 109; citing Taylor, 2007, pg. 598). She suggests the inconsistency of Taylor’s claim that cross-pressures and fragilization offer a

⁶⁷ Ruth Abbey, “Theorizing Secularity 3,” in *Aspiring To Fullness In A Secular Age: Essays On Religion And Theology In The Work Of Charles Taylor*, eds. Carlos Colorado and Justin D. Klassen (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014).

characterization of the culture, yet many, if not ‘most’ people are unaffected. It is ‘unclear’ how this could be so. For Abbey, the use of concepts such as cross-pressures and fragilization seem to reflect Taylor’s own ‘shifting stance’ rather than any actual reality in ‘culture.’ She questions whether it would be better if Taylor had stayed with the language of religious pluralism (Abbey, 2014, pg. 109). What would make Taylor’s claims more plausible, Abbey insists, is to hear from people who have changed beliefs and yet not felt such fragilization. Taylor would be more convincing for Abbey if he dealt less with abstract answers and more with actual experiences of people.

Abbey’s criticism has much merit. However, I maintain that Taylor’s analysis holds. Taylor could have traded in the language of ‘religious pluralism’, however his scope is broader than that, unless one includes materialistic atheism within the range of ‘religious’ pluralism. Regarding his characterization of the culture as cross-pressured and fragilized Taylor writes (Taylor, 2007, pg. 598),

That is not the point, which is rather that these [middle] positions themselves are defined in a field of extreme ones, transcendental religion on one hand, and reductive materialism on the other, are crucial reference points (emphasis mine).

Taylor seems uninterested in reconciling what appears to be a discrepancy in his claim. His concern is to alert us to the ‘field’ or array of options in which people operate within the immanent frame, should a person feel the cross pressure or fragilization. I maintain that Taylor’s assessment is correct, i.e., regardless of what position a person holds, at the end of each pole, i.e., the extremes of possibilities, are orthodox faith on one end and materialist atheism on the other. In some cases, vacillation is possible.

As a result of living between the extreme poles, people may feel a sense of longing, an experience of lacking or even a revulsion of the current state of affairs. A person may begin to question, ‘Is this all there is to life?’ Life can suffer a ‘lack of weight, gravity, thickness or substance’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 307). An existential crisis can exist – the ‘malaises of immanence’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 309). For Taylor, malaise is a shared cultural emotion.

Two decades prior to Taylor writing *A Secular Age*, Mircea Eliade offered a competing variation of the modern cultural emotion.⁶⁸ He recognizes a heightened *anxiety*, rather than malaise, regarding the loss of meaning and the shallowness of existence. He terms this feeling a ‘existential anxiety.’ This anxiety is a result of ‘the absence of things yearned for.’ Eliade’s important contribution to the discourse is the notion that the more secular, non-religious people resist the transcendent, the more acute and painful the anxiety. Following Eliade’s lead we can say that the more acute the anxiety, the more intense the relief. If Taylor is more accurate, then we can say the more intense the malaise, the greater the eventual relief.

However, for those who do feel the cross-pressures and malaise, and doubt the secular narratives, and feel the malaise or a haunting sense that there could be more, life can become fragilized, painful, and even meaningless. The quest for fullness, or transcendence is then embarked upon. Questions may arise, even if unarticulated: ‘What is a fantastically realized life?’ ‘What is a life lived to the fullest?’ ‘What is really living?’ In other words, ‘How do I experience fullness?’

Therefore, I maintain that we are still in a position to suggest that art can be a medium for experiences that direct people away from whatever the cultural emotion might be, whether it be shared or individual. Regardless where a person is located on the spectrum - orthodox religions to materialistic atheism - art can be a medium for orientating that person to the Transcendent God.

⁶⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, 1987), pg. 211.

1.5 Moving Forward: The Significance of Art

Therefore, I maintain that the significance of this view of the immanent frame is what it means for the quest for fullness and meaning. William Dyrness argues that everyone, at one point or another, will have projects that get them up in the morning, for which they live and around which they develop a certain liturgy of praise and worship. These liturgies may be as varied as supporting a favourite sports team, or outdoor activities, or vocation, or even family.⁶⁹ Everyone wants a life worth living. Human flourishing is a common the goal of humanity in this world (Taylor, 2007, pg. 573). Or, as Aristotle put it: all things seek the good.⁷⁰ Yet the secular person may believe him- or herself to inhabit a closed world structure in which God has been subtracted; they may be the buffered self who relies on instrumental rationality to navigate the world. Moreover, many feel the cross-pressures, the pull of internal doubt that something more might exist. Thus, the human dilemma is to find true human flourishing – a life of meaning, a life worth living, or fullness – from within, constrained by the immanent frame. This is the critical starting point. The concept of immanent frame is a concept that accurately reflects the situation in which moderns find themselves. Moreover, this should be acknowledged and engaged as the necessary starting point for the Christian mission endeavour.

Acknowledging this reality, the Church can be better equipped to assist secular unbelievers in their questions, such as ‘Does transcendence exist?’ And if so, how is it experienced? Do counter-narratives exist that offer a solution to closed immanence on one side and the sense that ‘this doesn’t work for me’ on the other? Artists can introduce into this situation questions about God through the works they create. Artists, through their works can

⁶⁹ William A. Dyrness, *Poetic Theology: God and the Poetics of Everyday Life*, pgs. 3-6.

⁷⁰ *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. William D. Ross, (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 1999), I,1.

communicate their own subjectivity, i.e., what they know, how they feel and what they have experienced of the world, the things of the world, even God and the things of God.

As will be demonstrated below, there are artists who have already embarked on this quest. They invite the viewer to contemplate answers to these very questions when the viewers contemplate their works. While believing the above statements to be true, this study recognizes that the argument for the role of art is not a silver bullet or the end-all-be-all for evangelization but will be effective for the segment of the population for whom art is important; others may not be moved by this approach.

2 Romanticism

This dissertation has suggested that a crucial piece for understanding Taylor's immanent frame is its Romantic impulse. If this is the case, then a pause is perhaps warranted here in order to address the questions of what Romanticism is, how it continues to influence Western culture and how its view of art is crucial for modern secular people.⁷¹ William Dyrness writes (Dyrness, 2011, pg. 19),

Romanticism is the idea that something outside oneself can be found and captured in art which can bring fulfillment to persons - can move them beyond simple human flourishing...In terms of our argument, the Romantics recognized that practices and objects could draw the human person out of themselves toward a higher and fuller life.

Taylor writes (Taylor, 2007, pg. 609),

I refer to the aspiration to wholeness, particularly as it emerges in the reaction against the disciplined, buffered self in the Romantic period. The protest here is that the rational, disengaged agent is sacrificing something essential in realizing his ideals. What is sacrificed is often described as spontaneity or creativity, but it is even more frequently identified with our feelings, and our bodily existence.

It is through the Romantic impulse that the experience of art, both in its creation and participation as a viewer, can be a medium for the experience of fullness. Therefore, the

⁷¹ Michael Ferber, *Romanticism: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Eugene Delacroix: "What is Romanticism," <https://mymodernmet.com/what-is-romanticism/> and <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/romanticism>; accessed 28 June, 2021; Honour, *Romanticism*, (New York, Westview Press, 1979); Isaiah Berlin, Excerpt From: Berlin, Isaiah, Hardy, Henry, Gray, John. *The Roots of Romanticism* 2nd Edition, Apple Books, pg. 37.

argument of this dissertation is that due to the Romantic impulse, the experience of art is a medium for the experience of fullness because we are all, in some sense, Romantics now.

Romanticism can best be understood as more of a mindset, and not as a movement *per se*. As a response to the Industrial Revolution, Romanticism seeks to give the individual a different way to *be*, as well as a way of escape from the harsh, ugly, industrial and rational universe. This escape happens through imagination, emotion and the appreciation of the beauty of nature. These were mediums of catharsis, healing and wholeness. To Romantics, emotions, creativity and nature are central to human relations, because human values should not be reduced to commercial ethics. Drawing inspiration from Christianity, Romanticism provides the individual meaningful emotional space separated from the society's infringement. Romanticism stressed the rights and feelings of the individual and the idea that an inner voice, or impulse, generated by feelings as a source of truth was crucial to this.

The Enlightenment had successfully removed the transcendent God for many modern people. He may no longer be active among us. Nietzsche claimed he may even be dead.⁷² However, his divinity continues to reside in sublime nature. Romantics thus sought the experience of emotions in encounters with nature, the kind of encounters that one might previously have had during experiences or encounters with God. This aspect is significant. Romanticism as a religious-like experience is prevalent today. However, Romantic spiritual encounters are immanent and horizontal. 'Instead of directing one's emotional fervour vertically, to a transcendent God, the Romantic generally directed it horizontally – either outwards towards the depths of nature, or inwards towards the depths of the soul.'⁷³ Both the experience of nature and the portrayal of nature in art sought to capture this.

⁷² Friedrich Nietzsche, *God is Dead. God Remains Dead. And We Have Killed Him*, (Penguin Publishing Group, 2021).

⁷³ Ferber, *Romanticism, A Very Short Introduction*, 66.

William Wordsworth wrote poetry about the natural world and its beauty. He was possessed of a hatred for everything mechanical and industrial. In his writings, he invited the readers to enter and enjoy the natural world over against the industrial world. Whether one reads Wordsworth's *Lake District* poems (1799) or observes Caspar David Friedrich's painting, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, (1818), one can be transported to those times and places in order to share with Wordsworth's enjoyment of the pleasant beauty of a lake house or Friedrich's enjoyment of a solemn moment by the sea.



7. *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*

The arts, for the first time, focused on the person, an individual who had intense emotions, feelings and longings for life or a different life. The ordinary person, with his or her individuality, desires and perspectives, was celebrated. The struggles and the passions of both the artist and the characters depicted in their art were the primary focus of the art. Moreover, the viewer was invited to participate in the experience through the work. Romantic art was art with a heart.

3 The Role Art Came to Play

3.1 *Art With A Heart*

Artists of the Romantic movement are free to share their hearts, their deepest passions, emotions and concerns, regardless of the subject, whether it be war, sex, or nature. A key theme in their art is *freedom*. Freedom from traditional styles and frameworks and the freedom of expression. The point of artwork is now about what the artist is feeling and how they saw the world. Works of art were now also to be interpreted; they were no longer viewed for their accuracy in *mimesis*. For example, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe published, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), which is the story of a young poet who longs to love a married woman. Since Werther cannot have her, he commits suicide. Von Goethe intends that the reader sympathize with young Werther, that we feel his intense pain and emotional suffering. The reader is to applaud young Werther for pursuing the desires of his heart, regardless of how foolish the pursuit is. The book sold over 3 million copies and possibly contributed to a rash of suicides all over Europe. The novel, written in diary form, changed the way we see love: the sensible is rejected for the passionate, and it is right to follow your heart.⁷⁴

The Romantic movement created the Age of Authenticity. According to Isaiah Berlin,⁷⁵

Romanticism embodied a new and restless spirit, seeking violently to burst through old and cramping forms, a nervous preoccupation with perpetually changing inner states of consciousness, a longing for the unbounded and the indefinable, for perpetual movement and change, an effort to return to the forgotten sources of life, a passionate effort at self-assertion both individual and collective, a search after means of expressing an unappeasable yearning for unattainable goals.

The Enlightenment motto was, 'I think therefore I am,' while the motto of Romanticism became, as Isaiah Berlin suggests, *volo ergo sum*: 'I choose, therefore I am.'⁷⁶

⁷⁴ The book is based on an actual episode in von Goethe's life. In 1772, two years before the novel was published, Goethe experienced a similar intense period of love and depression, when he was unable to have in marriage Charlotte Buff, who was at that time engaged to his friend Johann Christian Kestner.

⁷⁵ Berlin, Isaiah, Hardy, Henry, Gray, John. *The Roots of Romanticism*, pg., 4

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pg., 5.

3.2 *Subtler Languages*

Taylor explains the importance of the Romantic period. Moralism produced by the move toward Deism had failed. It was repressive. The sense of significance or value, previously pursued in moralism, is now to be found in the ‘aesthetic realm’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 358). Art has become an ethical category and is taking a pivotal and crucial place in culture. Art is now a source from which such questions regarding the goal and purpose of life, what is valuable, and how a person should thus live are answered. Beauty is what will now save us. Moreover, this beauty is located outside oneself, whether it be in nature or in the sublime cosmos. Beauty has a transforming effect. However, if individuals are to experience beauty they must open up to it at the deepest levels of their hearts. Such an openness requires that they be made aware of this exterior beauty, and this is the role that art came to play. Art can provide a language that enables the articulation and, thus, the experiences of such beauty. The creation of art becomes a compelling human endeavour. Taylor writes (Taylor, 2007, pg. 359),

So created beauty, works of art, are not only important loci of that beauty which can transform us, they are also essential ways of acceding to the beauty which we don’t create. In the Romantic period, artistic creation comes to be the highest domain of human activity.

The pursuit of the highest human goal through art and works of art is therefore immanent. It takes place within the world in which people actually live their lives. However, Taylor notes, that this does not necessarily exclude God. The pursuit of an ethical source through art and the subsequent aesthetic experience of being transformed by beauty does not occlude an ‘understanding of beauty as reflecting God’s work in creating and redeeming the world’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 359). God may still be manifested and understood through the created beauty of works of art. Taylor cites von Balthasar’s suggestion that a theological aesthetic is a very real possibility now. However, the buffered self needs first to be penetrated

if an openness to beauty and to God is to be actualized. A new language, the language of art, needs to be employed in order to penetrate the buffered self. Thus art becomes an important arena in which to introduce questions about God.

Taylor calls this language of art ‘subtler languages.’⁷⁷ In the modern secular situation there no longer exist ‘certain publicly available orders of meaning’ by which all persons basically understand the same things, in the same way, about the same world. Previous to the 18th century, there existed ‘sufficient intellectual homogeneity for men to share certain assumptions’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 353). In other words, there no longer existed a common vocabulary to describe the world and the things of the world, based on a shared worldview. Given that, art could no longer focus exclusively on *mimesis*, or the imitation and accurate presentation of a beauty found in an ordered cosmos in which were contained ‘the Christian interpretation of history, the sacramentalism of nature, the Great Chain of Being.’⁷⁸ The artists of the Romantic period now needed to articulate an original vision of the cosmos for their viewers and readers. Artists now seek ways to say things in order to articulate something in nature, or about the world, or God, for which currently ‘no adequate terms exist.’⁷⁹ The artists turn to the subjective presentation of their ‘own world of references.’⁸⁰ Modern art becomes the expression of the subjectivity of the artist - the expression of the self and what the artist knows and experiences of the self, the world and things of the world, or even God. In Chapters Five and Six of this study philosopher Jacques Maritain will suggest similar ideas regarding the creation and viewing of art.

Therefore, I maintain that the *subtler language* of art plays a crucial role in the way art comes into play. It is not a frontal assault on the viewer of art. Art as a subtler language creates a type of middle space for the secular, buffered self. The secular unbeliever might

⁷⁷ Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, pgs., 81-92, and *A Secular Age*, pgs., 355-361.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pg., 85.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pg., 86.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pg., 84.

normally be drawn toward unbelief, yet the experience of the beauty of art can bring the same person into a space of feeling the solicitations of the spiritual. Something of the transcendent can capture the attention of the unbelieving viewer. If so, the viewer is then forced to pause, to feel, as well as to contemplate. Something from outside touches the viewer's interiority, sometimes at a very deep level. It is in this experience of the sense of contact with a beautiful exterior reality that 'God [may] make break through the membrane' which separates the buffered self from the transcendent (Taylor, 2007, pg. 359). Taylor's use of the term *membrane* is significant as it hearkens back to Augustine's claim about God: 'You were more inward to me than my most inward part and higher than my highest.'⁸¹ Therefore, I maintain that buffered as the buffered self may be, it is not as far from transcendence as it may think or wish to be. The Transcendent God may be found in the secular person's own interior life. Such a person needs only to be awakened to this reality. Art can play that role.

Therefore, I maintain that the legacy of the Romantic period and the characteristics of our Post-Romantic situation is that higher or ultimate truths are not reached through instrumental rationality alone. That aspect of the modern Enlightenment project failed.⁸² I suggest that what is helpful now, following Taylor, is the subtler language of art to make manifest the higher or the divine. This is possible because, as will be demonstrated in Chapter

⁸¹ *Confessions*, Book III. 6.11. A Biblical echo is heard in Psalm 139:13-16: 13 (NIV):

For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.

⁸² Suzi Gablik, *Has Modernism Failed?* Revised edition, (London: Thomas and Hudson, 2004).

Three, art is a *locus theologicus*, a space in which the presence of God is active and can be encountered.

Moreover, it is also possible that this subtler language of art speaks to or resonates with both the artist and the viewer. Sharing in, or with, the subjectivity of the artist as they communicate what they know of themselves, the world, the things of the world, or even God can now be the role of art. Taylor summarizes, ‘Deeply felt personal insight now becomes our most precious spiritual resource’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 489). As we will see in Chapter Five, it is this human interiority that becomes the origin and goal of art.

3.3 Art As Epiphany

Art now becomes a medium of ‘epiphany’ (Taylor, 1989, pg. 419). For the Romantics, the work of art portrays something - nature, human emotion - in such a way as to manifest or reveal some greater spiritual reality or significance that is shining through it. Mimesis is no longer adequate. The epiphanies are now of being. The purpose of art is not to portray but rather to transfigure through presentation. The epiphany of what life is like, or could be, can be manifest *through the work*.

It now falls to the Romantic poet to articulate an original vision of the world and the potential life people can live (Taylor, 1989, pg. 381). In other words, something can be defined and created, even manifested through poetry or art. The artists are attempting to find words and language to give to the viewer. They are attempting to say something for which no adequate terms exist and whose meaning has to be found in their works instead of through conventional discursive language or categories (Taylor, 1989, pg. 381). Ezra Pound called the artist ‘the antennae of the race’ (Taylor, 1989, pg. 476, citing Hugh Kenner, *The Ezra Pound Era*, pg. 156).

What I want to capture with this term is just this notion of a work of art as the locus of a manifestation which brings us into the presence of something otherwise inaccessible, and in which is the highest

moral or spiritual significance; a manifestation, moreover, which also defines or completes something, even as it reveals.

In other words, it is the work of art that is the source of ‘epiphany.’ Taylor also affirms that what the work says goes beyond the obvious object portrayed. What the work reveals to the viewer originates within the interiority of the viewer.⁸³ The artist becomes the person who offers epiphanies of some great moral or spiritual significance manifested to the viewer (Taylor, 1989, pg. 423). This is now the role of art in the modern context; the creative imagination is now considered an ‘indispensable locus of moral sources’ (Taylor, 1989, pg. 426).

4 Conclusion: Art, A Romantic Solution

Art offers an aesthetic answer to the philosophical questions of meaning and fullness. Art can provide an answer to the moral, spiritual or emotional needs of people inhabiting the immanent frame because a primary characteristic of the frame is its Romantic impulse or our post-Romantic situation. Disenchantment created a world that could be closed off from transcendence, but the Romantics rebelled against this world. Authenticity and personal expression were the weapons deployed to drive back the malaise that drove the quest for meaning. Human beings need to feel human again. Art exploded into such a climate. Art became the exterior expression of the depth of human interiority. It was a subtler language than both rationalism and discourse. Art was not a frontal assault against the mind; rather, it comes in through the back door of the experience.

Art can now offer epiphanies of the great moral truths in the world. Art can also present alternative portraits of the world. Therefore, art may constitute a viable response

⁸³ *Sources of the Self*, pg. 420: ‘That is, we can’t understand what it is qua epiphany by pointing to some independently available object described or referent. What the work reveals has to be read in it. Nor can it be adequately explained in terms of the author’s intentions, because even if we think of these as definitive of a work’s meaning, they themselves are properly revealed in the work. And that being so, the work *must* be understood independently of whatever intentions the author has formulated in relation to it.’

within the immanent frame. Art could be a medium for the experience of fullness. However, the role of art is not the panacea for the communication of the gospel message, though it may be very effective for people for whom art is important. Secular people with other interests may not be moved at all by this approach.

This chapter has explored the concept of the immanent frame as the lived context for the pursuit of fullness. The next chapter dive into the concept of fullness and attempt to provide definitions of the notion and the attendant concept of transcendence.

Fullness and Transcendence

The previous chapter examined the immanent frame. It is from within this context that a person develops beliefs, and searches for meaning and significance. According to Taylor, in *A Secular Age* this journey for many people is one in which they seek the experience of fullness. The objective of this chapter is to examine how Taylor explains his ideas of fullness and transcendence in order to see how art can be an aesthetic answer to these philosophical concepts.

The chapter will proceed by first doing an inductive inquiry into Taylor's explanation of fullness. It will be shown that the notion of fullness is a philosophical attempt to describe the common desire of people to experience a life worth living. Fullness may come through an event, activity or in a condition by which a person feels him- or herself to be enjoying life to the full. Life, in that punctuated moment, or condition, is as it should be. Fullness is the pathway to transcendence. This study proposes that an aesthetic experience of art can be such an event or activity.

As well, this chapter will explore the concept of transcendence by tracing the development of Taylor's thought on the topic through some of his other writings. Experiences of transcendence is what all people desire due to an *ineradicable bent* toward transcendence. This study will also employ an interlocutor of Taylor who assists in clarifying the concept of transcendence that brings Taylor's thoughts to a more robust conclusion. It will be demonstrated that Taylor's initial concept of transcendence as defined in terms of *gaps* and *distance* and *remoteness* is insufficient. The more adequate way to understand transcendence may be through the Augustinian framework of *nearness*. Therefore, this chapter will draw the conclusion that a definition of transcendence is *the presence of God as He is manifest within*

the immanent frame. It will be demonstrated that this concept of transcendence offers a robust answer to this dissertation's research question. This being the case, we will then move forward with testimonies from artists and philosophers that point to transcendence - the presence of God as he is manifested in his nearness - as it can be experienced in art. Art is a *locus theologicus*, a space in which a person can encounter the presence of God. Therefore, I will conclude that the aesthetic experience of art can be a medium for the experience of fullness, and ultimately transcendence. Therefore, if the presence of God can be encountered in artistic and aesthetic spaces, then art and aesthetic experiences of art can be a medium which may aid secular unbelievers move toward the transcendent God.

1 Fullness

1.1 Defining Fullness

How did Taylor arrive at the term *fullness*? Taylor coined the term 'fullness' because he wanted a generic term, one that did not demand a religious context. The term is not intended to be a religious term, although many of Taylor's detractors read it that way. It is a generic term that describes a very full or satisfying life, or the kind of life which everyone seeks.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ In a 2008 interview Taylor was asked why he chose the word fullness. He replied, 'Yes, I've used this as a generic term on the grounds that I think everybody has some sense of, and desire for, a fantastically realized life, a life realized to the full. But in talking with people and reading reviews of the book, I've found that I'm often totally misunderstood on this. They thought that fullness could only be applied to explicitly religious positions, while the whole point was that I was looking for a generic term that applied to all people, whether religious or non-religious. But fullness made people shudder which might show that the search for a universally acceptable term might be mission impossible.' The interview continued: 'TOJ: Maybe that happens because you talk about fullness as something very generic that everyone can relate to, but then you proceed to offer your unique take on fullness as something that involves a sense of transcendence. So there are secularists, atheists, or non-religious people who might not have a problem with the language of fullness per se, but who are strongly opposed to a notion of fullness that leans on the language of transcendence. It seems that it is transcendence that they really have a problem with. CT: Well, what I tried to do in the book, and again it is so hard that it may be mission impossible, is to lay out a picture of the scene in which we are all involved, a scene that people could agree on even if they are coming from different positions. But I also wanted to add that I think we should also have full-disclosure, that is, communicating where I am coming from, where I am situating myself in the scene, and how I would then read the scene from that position. So while I do think we can come to a general agreement on the scene—the scene I just described a minute ago that's characterized by spiritual fragmentation and proliferation—I don't expect my readers to all agree with my more particular reading of the scene.' *The New Atheism and the*

In *A Secular Age* Taylor expounds on the notion (Taylor, 2007, pg. 5),

We all see our lives, and/or the space wherein we live our lives, as having a certain moral/spiritual shape. Somewhere, in some activity, or condition, lies a fullness, a richness: that is, in that place (or activity or condition), life is fuller, richer, deeper, more worth while, more admirable, more what it should be. This is perhaps a place of power: we often experience this as deeply moving, as inspiring. Perhaps this sense of fullness is something we just catch glimpses of from afar off; we have the powerful intuition of what fullness would be, were we to be in that condition, e.g., of peace or wholeness; or able to act on that level, of integrity or generosity or abandonment or self-forgetfulness. But sometimes there will be moments of experienced fullness, of joy and fulfillment, where we feel ourselves there...

To explicate this further, Taylor outlines three such kinds of lives: 1) fullness, 2) exile, and 3) the middle space. These categories allow his readers to ‘better understand belief and unbelief as lived conditions, not just as theories or sets of beliefs subscribed to’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 8).

The first kind of life Taylor explores is that of fullness. Taylor suggests that fullness can be found and experienced in an activity or a condition. It is in this space that life is more of what it should be. This experience of fullness can be moving and inspiring. It can produce the state of peace or wholeness as well as inspire a person to act. It can produce joy. The experience of fullness is an experience of a power that comes from beyond.⁸⁵ An important aspect of the experience of fullness is that it can be found in an event, activity or condition. The main argument of this dissertation is that the aesthetic experience of art can be such an activity.

The experience of fullness is meant to be transformational Taylor, 2007, pg. 6),

Experiencing fullness can help us rise to be the kind of person we desire to be: There may just be moments when the deep divisions, distractions, worries, sadnesses that seem to drag us down are somehow dissolved, or brought into alignment, so that we feel united, moving forward, suddenly capable and full of energy. Our highest aspirations and our life energies are somehow lined up, reinforcing one another, instead of producing psychic gridlock... These experiences... help situate the place of fullness, to which we orient ourselves morally or spiritually. They can orient us because they offer some sense of what they are of: the presence of God, or the voice of nature, or the force which flows through everything, or the alignment in us of the desire and the drive to form.

Spiritual Landscape of the West: A Conversation with Charles Taylor (Part one of three), by Ronald A. Kuipers, *The Other Journal*, June 12, 2008. Also, ‘In other words, a reading of “religion” in terms of the distinction transcendent/immanent is going to serve our purposes here’ (15).

⁸⁵ *A Secular Age*, pg., 10-11, ‘What does it mean to say that for me fullness comes from a power which is beyond me, that I have to receive it, etc.?... But I am never, or rarely, really sure, free of all doubt, untroubled by some objection – by some experience that won’t fit, some lives which exhibit fullness on another basis, some alternative mode of fullness which sometimes draws me...’

Thus, fullness is found in a variety of experiences - God, nature, or beauty - which are all possible within the immanent frame. Fullness is aspirational,⁸⁶ meaning that it is not the life that people actually live day by day, rather, it is those special, punctuated moments, or episodes, toward which people orientate their lives. Fullness can be life-changing in that it may open horizons for what life could be like. Fullness properly understood is a reflection of transcendence, of which people have a sense. Transcendence is the meaning of fullness. Moreover, for Taylor, ultimately, transcendence points toward a relationship with or to the transcendent God of Abraham. Taylor explains (Taylor, 2007, pg. 769),

If I am right that our sense of fullness is a reflection of transcendent reality (which for me is the God of Abraham), and that people have a sense of fullness, then there is no absolute point zero. But there is a crucial point where many come to rest in our civilization, defined by a refusal to envisage transcendence as the meaning of fullness.

More important than a mere experience of an object or activity, the experience of fullness is potentially life-changing. At the ‘core’ of an experience of fullness is its ‘heart-transforming, life-changing nature’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 730). Moreover, experiencing moments of fullness may potentially unsettle us. Fullness can break through or breach our normal conceptions of the world, as a person’s world is revealed and may need to be remade.

Taylor stresses this aspect of fullness in Chapter 20 of *A Secular Age*, entitled, “Conversions.” These conversions brought about by experiences of fullness involve paradigm changes which allow a person to see something beyond the immanent frame, changing the meaning of all the elements found within the immanent frame. ‘Things make sense in a whole new way’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 730-731). In other words, a person’s entire outlook on life, and the understanding of life’s meaning, purpose and significance can be altered by an experience of fullness. Joy and fulfillment may be experienced and thus vision, priorities, values and

⁸⁶ *A Secular Age*, pg., 780, footnote 8: “‘Fullness’ has come to be my shorthand term here for the condition we aspire to, but I am acutely aware how inadequate all words are here. Every possible designation has something wrong with it. The glaring one in the case of ‘fullness’ is that according to one very plausible spiritual path, visible clearly in Buddhism, for instance, the highest aspiration is to a kind of emptiness (*sunyata*); or to put it more paradoxically, real fullness only comes through emptiness. But there is no perfect terminological solution here, and so with all these reservations I let the word stand.’

passions are rearranged, even redirected toward something previously unconsidered and higher. Something beautiful is experienced, and a new register for life is now sought, an ‘aspiration to something transcendent’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 731).

Therefore, I maintain that is this above-mentioned aspect of fullness - the power to transform - that is most congruent to the capability of art. As will be explained further later in this study, works of art can introduce the viewer to new worlds, new ways of being, and, not yet realized realities for the individual and the community. Or as Taylor says, ‘They bring into view something beyond the frame.’ Chapter One of this study introduced Nicholas Wolterstorff and his concept of *world-projection*.⁸⁷ Through world-projection the artist presents to the viewer, through the work, a picture, concept, or critique of the current situation, or what the world could be. Through the aesthetic experience of the work, the viewer can be moved deeply and affectively, as well as have a heart- or life-changing paradigm shift as they open themselves to what the piece will speak. More on this will be discussed in Chapter Six, however it is safe to acknowledge that Taylor’s concept of the experience of fullness comports well with an aesthetic experience of a work of art. Fullness and art travel along the same philosophical and phenomenological trajectory, thus making art a potential medium for the experience of fullness.

1.2 *Exile*

There exists a second condition, called *exile*, that can have a negative impact. The experience of exile can produce the reverse effect from fullness. In this place or condition a person can experience ‘a distance, an absence, an exile, a seemingly irremediable incapacity to ever reach this place...a melancholy’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 6). In this condition the experience

⁸⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “The Action of World-Projection,” in *Art in Action: Toward A Christian Aesthetic*, 122-155. See Chapter 1, Section 1.2.

of fullness is elusive, almost unattainable. A person can lose sight of what fullness consists of or if it could ever be experienced. A person may feel a great sense of loss, or melancholy.

Art can orientate a person in the space of exile as well, with or without the intention of offering a way out. An example of this potentially negative aesthetic experience is British artist Tracey Emin's installation piece *My Bed*.



8. *My Bed*

Through the work Emin shares an episode of depression following a break-up of a romantic relationship. Through this installation piece Emin depicts the emotional fallout she experienced. A prose or even poetic account of her experience may not be as profound as actually viewing the bed. The viewer can, to some degree, understand what Emin experienced, and truly empathize with her. The viewer can feel what Emin felt and have sympathetic, visceral reactions, without actually having experienced the loss of a romantic relationship. The viewer may feel the work at the level of their own being; the viewer is not simply looking at a portrait of Emin's experience.

A more comprehensive exploration of the piece will be given in Chapter Five. For now, however, it can be suggested that Emin gives a picture of aspects of what life should not be, through a piece that bespeaks of an experience that brought pain and despair and should be avoided if possible. Much modern art, to its credit, contains disorder and ugliness; it is

honest about the hardships of life. Often it intends to communicate the pain suffered in life and the lack of joy and delight in the beautiful. This is not to be understood as a weakness of modern art, or that modern art is bad because of this, rather, this aspect is one of its strengths.

A valid question could be posed against my point here. Could not art aid a person who is experiencing exile in drawing near to the Transcendent God? Could not an aesthetic experience of art be helpful for someone experiencing a ‘dark night of the soul’? Regarding the first question, art can possibly aid a person in moving toward God during an experience of exile. If it can, this would be due to the negative nature of the aesthetic experience, such that Emin sought to foster. In other words, art can present a world, or an experience that we should *not* desire, or interpret as healthy or beneficial. Thus, such an aesthetic experience of art can move a person toward God precisely because it does *not* provide an experience of fullness; it alerts the viewer that another path must be taken. Fullness must then be sought in a different work of art. However, this dissertation is attempting find an aesthetic answer to the concept of fullness, not negative aesthetic experiences.

In reply to the second question, I would answer in the affirmative. Art could very well be a profound aid during such a spiritual experience. However, the dark night of the soul refers to a spiritual journey of purgation, pain and suffering on the way to God, which is a different type of experience than fullness. How art could aid a person on such a journey would be a beneficial study. However, that is beyond the scope of this dissertation, which is focusing on the experience of fullness as a path to God.

In summary, fullness is found in an activity or condition in which life is satisfying and fully realized. Fullness is transformational; it can move a person toward the kind of people we desire to be. It is aspirational; it can provide glimpses of what a person might like life to be. Therefore, I will maintain that the aesthetic experience of art can be such an activity.

2 Transcendence: Locating the Presence of God Within the Immanent Frame

2.1 *A Catholic Modernity?*

The concept of transcendence is multivalent.⁸⁸ In Taylor's own work he offers various nuanced understandings of transcendence. While Taylor does not mention transcendence in *Source of the Self*, he does introduce the concept of transcendence in *A Catholic Modernity?*

Taylor speaks of transcendence as being 'beyond life' (Taylor, 1999, pg. 20). He outlines three aspects of transcendence as beyond life. By 'life' Taylor means our physical life that we live in this world; our 'this worldly' existence. First, life goes on after death, therefore the 'the fullness of life,' or the 'goodness' of a life lived here and now is not to be my only, or perhaps even my primary, end. Citing John Stuart Mill, Taylor suggests that a full life must be one in which a person, looking beyond himself, strives for the betterment of all of humanity. Second, God does will human flourishing, but 'thy will be done' is not solely exhibited in human flourishing. Exclusive humanism is the drive for human beings to flourish here and now, to the greatest extent possible. In contrast, if one considers transcendence, then the fullness of life can include suffering and death, which is unimaginable in exclusive humanism. Third, transcendence requires a 'change in identity' (Taylor, 1999, pg. 21). The new self is one who is 'decentered' in relation to God. A person is no longer the focal point of his or her own existence; they possess a new life orientated toward God.

So it seems that in *A Catholic Modernity?* what Taylor means by transcendence is something of an immanent transcendence, i.e., one in which the person goes beyond him- or herself in order to facilitate the flourishing of others, within this life in the immanent frame. It is in this way that one 'weaves the life of God' into ordinary life (Taylor, 1999, pg. 21).

⁸⁸ See: Charles Taylor, "Transcendent Humanism In A Secular Age," in *Reimagining The Sacred*, eds. Richard Kearney and Jens Zimmermann, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), pgs. 76-92; Ian Fraser, "Charles Taylor on Transcendence: Benjamin, Bloch and Beyond," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 29 no. 3, 2003, pgs. 297-314; David James Stewart, "'Transcendence' in *A Secular Age* and Enchanted (Un)Naturalism," in *Charles Taylor, Michael Polanyi and the Critique of Modernity: Pluralist and Emergentist Directions*, ed. Charles W. Lowney II, (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017), pgs. 93-118.

Transcendence here is the contrast to exclusive humanism - in which a person lives for his or her own highest flourishing - because a person is not centered on himself, but is allowing the life of God to flow from him or her to others. Taylor referred to this as 'self-transcendence' (Taylor, 2007, pg. 44).

However, this transcendence is not the powerful experience of something beyond us, or lived experience which cannot be fully explained by life within the immanent frame, as described in *A Secular Age*. This 'self-transcendence' is not the life-changing moment of inspiration or insight which can break-in on us through activities or experiences and momentarily overwhelm us. Rather, this kind of life of 'weaving' would appear to be the kind of transformed life that is a *result* of the experience of fullness and transcendence. Perhaps in *A Catholic Modernity?* Taylor has arrived at the conclusion - a transformed life - prior to explaining the experience (fullness) that leads to such a result.

2.2 *The Ineradicable Bent*

There are events in life that are clearly non-religious yet do not fit into the category of the disenchanted, secular world, either. In these events, a person can have a powerful experience of the transcendent which a disenchanted understanding of the world cannot explain. A life-changing moment of inspiration or insight can break through these experiences and momentarily overwhelm a person with a sense that they have just experienced something that they know, intuitively, is greater and beyond what can be explained in current worldly terms. They are in touch with the transcendent, even if they cannot articulate it as such.

Taylor suggests this is due to people having an *ineradicable bent* toward transcendence. Something in the depths of the human person craves an experience of transcendence. Taylor summarizes, 'If the transcendental view is right, then human beings

have an ineradicable bent to respond to something beyond life' (Taylor, 2007, pg. 638). Not satisfied with the immediate experience of the 'wow!' this experience can start a person down a path of serious spiritual inquiry. A person may desire to take this experience further to see if the initial intuition or insight can be deepened. What began as a punctuated moment may develop into spiritual practices that, in turn, may lead the seeker to more 'traditional forms of faith.' Taylor writes (Taylor, 2007, pg. 518),

Many people are not satisfied with a momentary sense of wow! They want to take it further, and they are looking for ways of doing so. That is what leads them into practices which are their main access to traditional forms of faith.

As a result of such experiences, a person may return to traditional forms of faith.

This dissertation is suggesting that the aesthetic experience of art can be such a 'wow!' moment. Taylor describes it thus (Taylor, 2007, pg. 757),

A poetic new language [art] can serve to find a way back to the God of Abraham.

Therefore, an aesthetic experience of fullness, through the experience of art, can move a person toward the transcendent God. If it is the case that the human person craves such an experience, then it can be proposed that the human gaze simply needs to be lifted higher. Aesthetic experiences of art could be such experiences.

2.3 Nearness Rather Than 'Gaps'

Taylor's interlocutors are many and the conversation on transcendence is broad. Jasper van Buuren is critical of Taylor and suggests that Taylor is inconsistent in his presentation of transcendence between *Sources of the Self* and *A Secular Age*.⁸⁹ In van Buuren's perspective Taylor is too ambiguous in the definition. Van Buuren asks the critical question, 'What can count as "transcendent," and in what sense?' He addresses follow-up questions: Does transcendence refer to something within immanence, or the immanent, yet

⁸⁹ Jasper van Buuren, "From *Sources of the Self* to *A Secular Age*: The Development of Taylor's Concept of Transcendence," *A Journal of Religion, Education and the Arts*, Issue 9, 2014, pg. 99; <http://rea.materdei.ie/>, accessed 20 July, 2021.

still outside the person himself? Interacting with Taylor's concept, Van Buuren wonders if transcendence is something that invades from beyond the immanent frame itself? Is transcendence personal or impersonal? (van Buuren, 2014, pg. 99). Van Buuren may be noticing Taylor's development of thought between *A Catholic Modernity?* and *A Secular Age*. I affirm van Buuren's assessment that Taylor's understanding of transcendence needs to be sharpened.

Aspiring To Fullness In A Secular Age, edited by Carlos D. Colorado and Justin D. Klassen, (2014) is a series of essays that analyze and assess Taylor's fullness thesis in *A Secular Age*.⁹⁰ Paul D. Janz's essay in particular will be helpful in filling out the picture of what might be a suitable definition of transcendence.⁹¹

Janz criticizes Taylor's 'reticence' for not taking an actual position as to where the narration of *A Secular Age* leads (Janz, 2014, pg. 43). Janz acknowledges that one of Taylor's primary purposes is not to put forward his own positions, but expose the background pictures of the contemporary situation (Janz, 2014, pg. 44). Janz's section, 'Transcendence' (Janz, 2014, pg. 48-50) notes that Taylor and others use transcendence in contrast to immanence. The term is employed as a broader category that means 'human flourishing.' Therefore, the question of transcendence is not, first of all, with respect to "God" or the "sacred" or the "supernatural" or any other specifically religious point of orientation' (Janz, 2014, pg. 47). Janz wonders whether Taylor proposes that the highest, the best life is to be found within the goals of human flourishing, or does the highest and the best life go 'beyond' human flourishing? Janz notes that the question relates equally to fullness (Janz, 2014, pg. 48).

According to Janz, the weakness of Taylor's answer is that Taylor only views transcendence from the linguistic or conceptual perspective: the beyond of transcendence is

⁹⁰ *Aspiring To Fullness In A Secular Age*, ed. Carlos D. Colorado and Justin D. Klassen, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014).

⁹¹ Paul D. Janz, 'Transcendence, "Spin," and the Jamesian Open Space,' pgs. 39-70.

merely the negative definition of transcendence, i.e., transcendence is simply ‘not immanence’ - an affirmation to which, Janz suggests, even an unbeliever would agree (Janz, 2014, pg. 49). For Janz, this is a crucial oversight on Taylor’s part.

Janz is helpful when he notes that Taylor’s definition of transcendence as simply the negation of immanence ‘makes no claims on the ontological reality of what is affirmed’ (Janz, 2014, pg. 49). In other words, Janz’s critique seems to be that Taylor’s understanding of transcendence occludes any sense of realism. His questions may be along the lines of, ‘Does anything actually happen in an experience of transcendence?’ ‘Does transcendence include any experience?’ For Janz, transcendence seems to be merely a conceptual truism. In other words, Taylor’s concept of transcendence, which is put forward as a moral source, is really only a ‘linguistic notion of the intellect,’ - i.e., it carries no ontological reality (Janz, 2014, pg. 49). In this sense, Janz argues, transcendence cannot be ‘an independent or “ontological” source of anything’ (Janz, 2014, pg. 49). Therefore, transcendence in this sense is an ontological illusion. Janz concludes by claiming that what is needed is ‘what the meaningfully authoritative “content” of the transcendent might be for human life’ (Janz, 2014, pg. 49).

Janz’s most pressing statement, and the one most relevant to this study, is, ‘What is rightly expected here is an account of *how* that which is transcendent announces itself uniquely and genuinely as a life-meaningful authority for questions of moral sources of human fullness. But no such authoritatively ampliative or nontruistic account of transcendence is offered’ (Janz, 2014, pg. 49). While Taylor offers *agape* as a kind of content for transcendence, Janz does not see this construal as a uniquely attributable transcendent or theistic source.

Janz is both correct and incorrect in his assessment. He is correct that *agape* is not sufficient as a philosophical, or theological moral source; nor can *agape* provide an adequate

account of how the transcendent ‘announces itself.’ Janz is incorrect, however, to suggest that Taylor’s concept of transcendence is merely linguistic and not ontological, or realist. His question is a good one: How does Taylor’s concept of transcendence display an *ontological* reality? Alternatively, what actually is transcendence according to the account given in *A Secular Age*? What Janz perhaps overlooks is Taylor’s definition of transcendence as articulated in *A Catholic Modernity*? Janz’s essay focused only on Taylor’s concept of transcendence found in *A Secular Age*. In *A Catholic Modernity*? Taylor defines transcendence as ‘self-transcendence,’ i.e., incarnationally as ‘weaving the life of God’ into ordinary life. This is ontological or realist. To ‘weave the life of God’ into one’s personal life seems necessarily to involve an experience of something - a power or a person - from outside the self, that changes and transforms a person. It is through this transformation that a person is able to offer the radical self-renunciation that is self-transcendence.

Therefore, I maintain that, against Janz, that transcendence is an independent or ontological source. While the focus of Taylor’s argument in *A Catholic Modernity*? is that the person goes beyond the self in order to facilitate the flourishing of others within this life, the rubric under which Taylor derives this application is the concept of ‘weaving.’ This seems quite ontological or realist. Taylor’s two accounts of transcendence must be read together. Perhaps Taylor has given his accounts of transcendence in reverse order. The transcendence of *A Secular Age* is the external, ontological source of the internal transformation that results in the ‘self-transcendence’ of *A Catholic Modernity*?

Janz’s most helpful point is that Taylor’s argument is one which ‘narrows the gap’ and ‘reduces the distance’ between transcendence and immanence (Janz, 2014, pg. 64, quoting Taylor). He disagrees with what he calls ‘Taylor’s “Plato-type” or “Greek” distance-construal of transcendence (as opposed to that of the “Hebraic” and Christian understanding)’ (Janz, 2014, pg. 64-65). Janz suggests that Taylor’s view of transcendence is fundamentally

at odds with traditional Jewish and Christian construal. Taylor's transcendence is set over against immanence and is characterized by 'distance, gaps and remoteness.' Janz concludes that a true language of transcendence transcends even the language of distance, measurement or gaps (Janz, 2014, pg. 64).

The solution, according to Janz, is to draw on Augustine's view of transcendence as articulated in *On The Trinity*. For Augustine, the terms 'unspeakability,' 'unthinkability' and 'invisibility' are preferred terms when not predicated on human limitations. Jeremy Begbie employs the concept of God's 'uncontainability.' In other words, God cannot be 'circumscribed or encompassed, grasped or held by what is not God. This includes, of course, human language.'⁹² These terms work outside of the distance, and gap framework. God as 'unthinkable' and 'invisible' does not mean that we would be able to comprehend him or see him if only our own limitations could be magnified to infinity. It means that God is not an 'objectively apprehensible or representable source of *any kind*' (Janz, 2014, pg. 64-65, emphasis original). Janz quotes Turner that God's transcendence cannot be construed in 'metaphors of "gaps," even infinitely "big" ones' (Janz, 2014, pg. 65). Turner speaks of God's transcendence as being 'closer to my creaturehood than it is possible for creatures to be to each other,'⁹³ for 'creatures are more distinct from each other than God [precisely in his transcendence of their creaturehood, and thus also of his transcendence of their creaturely distance] can possibly be from any of them.'⁹⁴

The solution for Janz is to not the language categories of beyond, but rather the intimacy categories of Augustine. This study agrees with Janz: this is where Taylor's account

⁹² Jeremy Begbie, *Redeeming Transcendence in the Arts: Bearing Witness to the Triune God*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), pg. 6.

⁹³ According to St. Augustine, 'I sought after Thee, but not according to the understanding of the mind, by means of which Thou hast willed that I should excel the beasts, but only after the guidance of my physical senses. Thou wast more inward to me than the most inward part of me and higher than my highest,' *Confessions* III.6, (Nashville: Nelson Publishers, 1999), pg., 46.

⁹⁴ Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pg. 214.

of transcendence could be bolstered, in that Taylor retains the language categories of gaps, distance and remoteness. For Janz, Taylor misses the mark by failing to fundamentally realign how transcendence is understood, and where it is located. For Janz, it is a nearness that is lived in action, and it is to 'be found only and nowhere else than *in* the natural world, since this is the indispensable "site" at which divine revelation discloses itself as a transcendent source' (Janz, 2014, pg. 67).

Therefore, I maintain with Janz, that transcendence is to be found in the nearness of God, in this world or life, within the immanent frame, and especially, in a life lived out in intimacy with the transcendent God. Taylor has been intimating this all along, however, not explicitly.

Janz's insight was to hearken back to Augustine.⁹⁵ Thinking of transcendence in terms of distance, gaps and remoteness - Taylor's categories - misses the mark. The experience of transcendence is the nearness of the presence of God in and through the material creation. Human beings live in the world, whether it is recognized by them as God's living creation or a secular immanent frame. As Augustine teaches, the remote, distant God of gaps can never be reached, no matter how infinite our faculties. Janz clarifies his point,⁹⁶

And the unavoidable implication here (whether we intend this or not, which is precisely its illusion) is that if our sensible and rational powers were only greater, the transcendence by which God surpasses these capacities might then perhaps after all come into view through a magnification of the sensible or intellectual vision.

Moreover, the quest to leave the immanent frame is hopelessly lost; there is no exiting, there is no wardrobe in which a person can pass through into a magical land of peace and security. Transcendence must be encountered, not in immanence, i.e., in material things themselves, but rather, within immanence, i.e., within this material world that is infused with God's

⁹⁵ Paul D. Janz, *The Command of Grace: A New Theological Apologetics* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2009), pg. 73.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 73.

presence. Taylor is right to suggest that we cannot return to the pre-modern Enchanted World. So how, then, can transcendence be encountered within immanence?

Janz has been helpful in posing questions which provide a path toward answering the research question. Such answers include, first, transcendence is, in fact, an ontological reality. If a person is to become a qualitatively different person, one who lives self-sacrificially, then something significant needs to happen to them. Taylor said this about the experience of fullness, as well: experiencing fullness can help one rise to be the kind of person he or she desires to be (Taylor, 2007, pg. 5). Second, transcendence is a nearness that is lived in action. Rethinking transcendence in Augustinian terms of ‘unspeakability,’ ‘unthinkability,’ ‘invisibility’ and ‘uncontainability’ rather than in metaphors of distance, is a preferable framework.

Therefore, I maintain that it is possible to provide an adequate definition of transcendence. I propose that the kind of transcendence that Taylor has been suggesting could be defined as the presence of God, as he is manifested within the immanent frame. Remember that, for Taylor, fullness is a *reflection* of transcendence, of which people have a sense, and is meant finally to lead people to an experience of transcendence (Taylor, 2007, pg. 769).

Alan Hendrick recognizes the implications of transcendence being the presence of God. He writes,⁹⁷

The ‘buffered self’ is the name given by philosopher Charles Taylor to describe an individual in our culture who is isolated from any transcendent reality, that is, God’s presence. Taylor observes that, prior to 1500, almost everyone believed in God, understanding life to be meaningless without God. It was an ‘enchanted’ world in which vulnerable souls were open to God. Taylor refers to those knowingly impacted by God as ‘porous’ souls. In the enchanted premodern social imaginary, the self was open and susceptible to the presence of God.

⁹⁷ Alan Hendrick, “The Buffered Self,” *Canaan’s Rest* 5 September, 2016; <http://canaansrest.org/the-buffered-self>; accessed 18 August, 2023.

Fr. Robert Spitzer makes the identical connections when he notes the global prevalence of the acknowledgment of something ‘wholly Other’ and the intuitive and emotional numinous experiences of most peoples.⁹⁸

Therefore, I maintain that Janz’s summoning St. Augustine to testify is correct. The transcendence that St. Augustine himself experienced was simply the interiority of the presence of God. St. Paul tells us that creation itself testifies abundantly to the presence of God (Romans 1).

Moreover, I maintain that not only is God present in this world, within the immanent frame, he is reaching out to every person on the planet, as taught by John Wesley.⁹⁹ Wesley refers to the illuminating ‘light’ (John 1:9) which extends to every soul. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes it this way: ‘[T]he desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself.’¹⁰⁰ Thus it is the nearness of God which is experienced within the immanent frame. Therefore, I propose the conclusion that the experience of fullness can function as a point of contact for the experience of transcendence.

3 Works of Art and Encounters with the Transcendent God

Paul D. Janz’s relevant question is, ‘What is rightly expected here is an account of *how* that which is transcendent announces itself uniquely and genuinely as a life-meaningful authority for questions of moral sources of human fullness.’ Janz’s question provides the paradigm for offering an answer to the research question. In this last section, voices from within both the artworld and the theological world are called upon to testify that the

⁹⁸ Fr. Robert Spitzer, S.J., *The Soul’s Upward Yearning: Clues to Our Transcendent Nature From Experience and Reason (Happiness, Suffering, and Transcendence)*, Volume 2, pg. 25-26.

⁹⁹ John Wesley ‘The Scripture Way of Salvation’ in *The Complete Sermons: John Wesley* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), pg. 234.

¹⁰⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part 1, Section 1, Chapter 1, Article 1, Paragraph 27, (New York, London: Image, Doubleday).

transcendent announces itself through works of art. Art can be a space in which, through an aesthetic experience of works of art, a person can encounter God - though he be *unspeakable*, *unthinkable*, *invisible*, and *uncontainable* - and be drawn closer to Him. Art can be, therefore, the threshold to the transcendent, if the viewer be open to it.

3.1 *How Art Contributes to Faith*

James McCollough's short essay entitled, "*How Art Contributes to Faith*" is helpful here.¹⁰¹ He outlines four contemporary approaches to theological aesthetics. The four approaches are: 1) the ecstatic draw of beauty 2) the existential dimension of aesthetic experience 3) the sacramental nature of aesthetic phenomenon, and, 4) the phenomenological character of aesthetic experience. A brief overview of relevant portions of approaches 2) and 4) will demonstrate how aspects of each approach comports with Taylor's concept of fullness.

For the second view, the existential dimension of aesthetic experience, McCollough relies on an article by Stanley Hauerwas. So to Hauerwas we turn.¹⁰² According to Hauerwas, moral philosophers have failed to understand that moral behaviour is not the product of a succession of choices (Hauerwas, 1972, pgs. 38, 43, 44), but rather it derives from a proper vision of the good, and of God (Hauerwas, 1972, pg. 36). Then he writes,

The moral life, then, is more than thinking clearly and making rational choices. It is a way of seeing the world. Moral philosophy cannot abstain from recommending the best way to see the world (Hauerwas, 1972, pg. 39).

Taylor has offered similar analysis of the moral situation (Taylor, 1989, pgs. 92-93). Here Hauerwas affirms what Taylor has said regarding the constitutive good and the best account principle.¹⁰³ What is important for this study is that, according to Hauerwas, art is a source of

¹⁰¹ James McCullough, "How Art Contributes to Faith," *Academia Letters*, Article 194, 2021; <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL194>.

¹⁰² Stanley Hauerwas, "The Significance of Vision: Toward an Aesthetic Ethic" *Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion* 2 (1972), 36-49.

¹⁰³ Taylor's explanation of his Best Account principle was discussed in chapter one of this dissertation.

such a moral vision, because ‘ethics has more to learn from art than from the more “willful” aspects of our being.’ Art provides the ‘essential metaphors’ by which a person can understand their condition (Hauerwas, 1972, pg. 36). In other words, acts of volition, or decisions to be ethical, are not sufficient to empower a person toward the ethical, since these require a prior source. A person’s vision of the world, and a vision of the good need be obtained, or corrected. Moreover, it is through art that a person can receive such a clear picture of the real world and obtain the necessary vision of the good (Hauerwas, 1972, pg. 41). Therefore, it is to this vision of the good, presented to us through art, that a person must surrender, if they are to enjoy a good life.

The fourth view is also relevant to this study. According to McCullough, the significance of the phenomenological view is that a sense of presence is invested into a work of art, ‘one that connects the subjectivity of the viewer with its own subjectivity’ (McCullough, 2021, pg. 4). Jacques Maritain will offer a similar assessment. McCullough cites Aidan Nichols, who defines theological aesthetics as ‘the part played by the senses – with their associated powers of memory and imagination – in the awareness of God.’¹⁰⁴

The work to which McCullough refers is Nichols’s *The Art of God Incarnate* (1980). It will be helpful to consult this work directly in order to better understand Nichols’s contribution to this study. Nichols is Roman Catholic, therefore his perspective will follow much the same trajectory as Taylor’s and Maritain’s. Nichols asks the question of how works of art can be vehicles for divine revelation.¹⁰⁵ He notes that divine revelation presupposes that God desires to communicate and that human beings have the capacity of knowing such communication. These concepts comport well with Taylor’s concept of the *ineradicable bent* for transcendence within all human beings. The revelatory event which Nichols describes

¹⁰⁴ Aidan Nichols, *The Art of God Incarnate* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1980), pg., 13. Cited in, J. McCullough, “How Art Contributes to Faith,” *Academia Letters*, Article 194, (2021), pg. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., chapter seven, “The Artwork and Christian Revelation,” pgs., 105-118.

transpires as a moment of communion from the work of art through the mediation of signs. Viewers find themselves confronted by divine communication and reorganizing their own world of meaning in response. A personal response is required from the viewer. In the course of such an encounter, the work of art can shape a person's existence, 'moving us to the suppression of self so that fidelity to ultimate values may replace' what we previously believed, even though it call for a 'painful reshaping of our lives.' The revelatory event, Nichols concludes, 'satisfies' the pursuit 'towards transcendence' by disclosing the reality of God drawing near to us (Nichols, 1980, pg. 113).

Two points stand out in relation to this study. First, what Nichols has described as an experience of art is how Taylor describes an experience of fullness. Fullness comes through an activity, in this case through the aesthetic experience of a work of art. An experience of fullness can be 'heart-transforming and life-changing' such that 'Things make sense in a whole new way' (Taylor, 2007, pg. 730-731). Moreover, fullness is a reflection of transcendence (Taylor, 2007, pg. 769), or as Nichols describes it, 'the reality of God drawing near to us.' Nichols might respond to the person having an experience of fullness that he or she may very well be having an encounter with the transcendent God.

Second, Nichols has noted that such communication requires that human beings possess some ability to receive this communication. Jacques Maritain has termed this faculty *poetry*.¹⁰⁶ Poetry is the faculty which enables human beings to perceive and understand the spiritual as well the physical realities of the things of the world, in order that these might be communicated in works of art. Poetry allows the artist to create and the viewer to receive divine communication through works of art, thus providing for the experience of fullness *through the work*. These two points - the revelatory event of the experience of art, and the communion through poetry - provide the impetus for a philosophical and aesthetic answer to

¹⁰⁶ Maritain and his theory of art will be discussed in Chapters Five and Six of this dissertation.

the notion of fullness.

4 Richard Viladesau

Richard Viladesau also acknowledges the aesthetic as a source of theology. First, he believes that the aesthetic is ‘a locus of explicitly religious (and theological) experience, expression and discourse.’ Second, it is the space in which secular people experience either 1) the ‘implicitly’ religious, or 2) it is open to ‘correlation’ with the sacred.¹⁰⁷ In other words, the aesthetic realm is a space in which people, secular as well as believers, encounter God.¹⁰⁸

Viladesau posits that art can function as a theological text.¹⁰⁹ Thus art can function as 1) the locus of the faith tradition 2) a bearer of a theological message, and 3) a text for theology. It is this third dimension of art that is relevant for this study. Viladesau describes the function of theology as ‘correlational’, i.e., it attempts to forge links between questions that are asked in various human situations and the answers provided by God’s revelation. He suggests that in this process art plays a special role in theological thought in that art discerns the needs of the particular human situation that can be addressed by the Christian message (Viladesau, 1999, pg. 154). The style of art is not the issue. Every style can address the ultimate concerns of any human group. In this way the theologian who wishes to address thought forms of a particular context has a significant vehicle to do so through art. For Viladesau, this is a form of general revelation, and so may be termed ‘a word of God’ (Viladesau, 1999, pg. 155).

Viladesau suggests that if the Christian faith is to motivate people to action, then it

¹⁰⁷ Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God In Imagination, Beauty and Art*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pg. 15.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pg. 104. He writes, ‘Aesthetic experience seems to play a major role - at least for some people - in the exercise of the practical judgment for belief in God - perhaps a great deal more than the traditional “proofs” of God’s existence set forth in apologetic theology.’ In other words, art and the aesthetic proves to be a far more potent apologetic for God than philosophical or theological polemics.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts: Encountering God Through Music, Art and Rhetoric*, (New York: Paulist Press: 2000), pgs. 127-166.

must be able to present a concrete and attractive vision of the good (Viladesau, 1999, pg. 156). Taylor insists on this same dynamic in *Sources of the Self*. In fact, Taylor argued, every person, to some degree, pursues the good. Here Viladesau provides the artist who is a Christian with a stratagem to aid people in such a pursuit: ‘move the heart and stir the imagination.’ He insists, ‘In this sense...theology itself must become aesthetic.’ Moreover, this is to be done by discerning the sensibilities of the ‘contemporary imagination that are manifest in art’ (Viladesau, 1999, pg. 156-157).

Viladesau also posits that sacred art, i.e., art used in acts of worship, is to be ‘sacramental - in a general sense’ (Viladesau, 1999, pg. 158). This is because the concept of *sacrament* itself is analogous. Religious art mediates grace by signification (Viladesau, 1999, pg. 160). He writes,

What is peculiar to its mode of signifying is that it not only communicates a Christian message, but also, in so far as it is aesthetic, implicitly represents (to varying degrees) the ultimate goal of human desire...

Sacred art can be a medium of grace insofar as its beauty and/or aesthetic intensification of experience points beyond itself and engages the viewer with its subject matter, i.e., the Christian message, or God. This idea comports well with Maritain’s understanding of art.¹¹⁰

For Viladesau, this applies to sacred art, presumably meaning art created by those empowered by the Spirit of God. This may be the case. However, given what Maritain and music producer Rick Rubin have contributed to the discussion, this study will suggest that the analogy for which Viladesau argues applies to all art as created by human beings made in the

¹¹⁰ While Maritain does not use the language of the *sacramental* when theorizing about art, he and Viladesau make similar points. First, according to Maritain, the artist is attempting to *transcend* through her art. The artist is driven by *poetry* to give expression to the poetic intuition within her (Maritain, 2021, pg. 155). It is the interior, inner life of the artist, the poetic intuition or their own subjectivity, which is the source of creativity from which he or she works. Maritain referred to this as ‘poetic knowledge,’ i.e., the knowledge possessed by the subjectivity which makes the artist *capable* of the creation of works of art. Through the work the artist attempts to communicate their subjectivity, i.e., what they know, believe and have experienced of the world, the things of the world, or even God. Rick Rubin agreed, the work of art can offer glimpses into things beyond our understanding, i.e., transcendent things. Art is the portal to the unseen world (Rubin, 31). What Viladesau would call the *sacramental* in art, Maritain would call *poetry* and poetic intuition, and Rubin calls The Source.

image of God. Thus, all human art is said to be ‘God’s grandchild.’¹¹¹

5 Art as *Locus Theologicus*

Andrew Greeley posits that popular culture is a *locus theologicus*, a theological place in which one may encounter God.¹¹² Thus, *cultural* experiences are also, inseparably, *religious* experiences. Moreover, such cultural experiences can be experiences of transcendence, with art being the primary vehicle for this encounter.

George Steiner argues that God so clings to our culture that no matter how hard modern Western people want to dismiss him, they cannot. The cultural assumption is that no evidence for the existence of God exists. Steiner disagrees. He argues that, in fact, any explanation of human communication, through our very use of language and the arts is, by necessity, ‘underwritten by the assumption of God’s presence.’¹¹³ His wager is that human communication, especially through the arts, is meaningful, due to the presence of the transcendent God (Steiner, 1989, pg. 4). When considering secular culture, Steiner asks, ‘Why should there be art? Why poetic creation?’ His answer is, ‘This essay argues a wager on transcendence.’ He argues that there is in the art-act and its reception, the experience of meaningful form, a presumption of presence [of God].¹¹⁴ Thus for Steiner, the art-act is what it is - meaningful human communication - due to the presence of the transcendent God in that act. Steiner’s concept of transcendence aligns with the conclusion that Taylor’s concept of transcendence is appropriately understood as the *nearness* of the presence of God within the immanent frame.

¹¹¹ Dante Alighieri, *The Portable Dante*, ed. Mark Musa, (New York: Penguin Classics, 1995), pg., 60.

¹¹² Andrew Greeley, *God In Popular Culture* Chicago: The Thomas More Press, 1988), pg. 9.

¹¹³ George Steiner, *Real Presences*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pg., 3. Steiner writes, ‘I will put forward the argument that the experience of aesthetic meaning in particular, that of literature, of the arts, of musical form, infers the necessary possibility of this “real presence.”’

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pgs. 200 and 214.

Robert K. Johnston asks what Christians are to do with ‘those occasional encounters with God in our everyday lives that seem more real than everyday reality, more fundamental than everything else?’ Experiences such as, ‘being ushered into the divine Presence by a work of art, music, or literature?’ Johnston poses these questions because he recognizes the ‘reality of “media, arts and culture” as a primary locus of spiritual meaning,’ for many in secular, Western culture.¹¹⁵

Johnston is explicit that he believes such artistic and aesthetic experiences - though not of the kind which lead a person into a direct saving relationship with Christ - are actual encounters with the presence of God. These experiences are ‘numinous’ and ‘transformative.’ They illuminate, even if what is experienced is difficult to articulate. Johnston explains,¹¹⁶

While not having to do with one’s salvation in any direct way, and occurring outside the church and without direct reference to Scripture or to Jesus Christ, such encounters, for that is what they are experienced to be, are seen, heard, and read as foundational to life... What is the inherent value of God’s wider revelation, of experiences of God’s presence not directly tied to our salvation? And how are they to be understood theologically?

Johnston employs language similar to Taylor when he demonstrates that viewing a film can be an occasion to experience one of Taylor’s punctuated ‘wow!’ moments of fullness.

Johnston quotes Edward McNulty when he writes,¹¹⁷

[T]hat elusive moment...an ‘Aha!’ moment when the Spirit awakens us to something special in the film. It may be one of the characters, a word, a song, an image, or the way all of the elements of a shot or scene come together in the perfect way, making us aware that we are on holy ground.

This is how Taylor describes the punctuated moments of the experience of fullness.

Johnston’s (or McNulty’s) ‘Aha!’ moment and Taylor’s experience of fullness are the same kind of psychosomatic experience.

Rick Rubin, who is not a Christian, describes it this way, ‘Our work [i.e., the work of artists] embodies a higher purpose. Whether we know it or not, we’re a conduit for the

¹¹⁵ Robert K. Johnston, *God’s Wider Presence: Reconsidering General Revelation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), pg. 4.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., xiii.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pg. 44.

universe. Material is allowed through us. If we are a clear channel, our intention reflects the intention of the cosmos.’¹¹⁸ For Rubin, the very act of the creation of art is a vehicle, or medium, for the higher things of the created order. He recognizes something bigger and grander - transcendent - that is beyond anything found in immanence. Artists through their art bring that grander something near.

6 Can We Know Transcendence Was Experienced?

The previous section posited that art can be a space in which the presence of God is active. It was suggested that art can be a space in which, through the aesthetic experience of works of art, a person can encounter God and be drawn closer to him. Art, it was proposed, can be the threshold to the transcendent. But can we know with any degree of reliability that the aesthetic experience of art facilitated an experience of something external to the viewer of art? Can we know that the aesthetic experience was of something transcendent, or of God? Two voices will be added to the discourse to give testimony that the aesthetic experience of art does foster encounters with the transcendent God: Robert Wuthnow¹¹⁹ and Robert K. Johnston.¹²⁰

6.1 Robert Wuthnow

Wuthnow’s work is the result of ‘more than three decades’ focusing on spiritual interests of Americans (Wuthnow, 2003, pg. xiii). Immediately it must be noted that Wuthnow’s target audience is more focused than Taylor’s, as Taylor is concerned with the entire North Atlantic world. However, this should not detract too much from the value of

¹¹⁸ Rick Rubin, *The Creative Act: A Way of Being*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2023), pg. 95.

¹¹⁹ Robert Wuthnow, *All In Sync: How Music and Art Are Revitalizing American Religion*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003).

¹²⁰ Robert K. Johnston, *God’s Wider Presence: Reconsidering General Revelation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014).

Wuthnow's findings and their appearance in this study. Wuthnow, like Taylor, acknowledges that spirituality is deeply significant to modern people, that many people are on a 'quest to know God' and that contemporary discourse includes doubts about 'how to relate to the divine' (Wuthnow, 2003, pg. xiii). A main point of Wuthnow's findings is (Wuthnow, 2003, pg. xiv),

Another insight that emerges too often and too powerfully to be ignored is that music and poetry, paintings and sculpture, drama and dance, play a powerful role in many American's spiritual journeys. Music and art are closely wedded with the spiritual experience. They draw people closer to God, often by expressing what cannot be put into words. They spark religious imagination and enrich personal experiences of the sacred...A closer look at these experiences shows how importantly the arts figure in the spiritual journeys of many Americans.

As a result of this recognized importance of the arts, churches and synagogues, museums and galleries are deliberately concentrating more effort 'in bringing American's interests in the arts to bear on their quests for the sacred' (Wuthnow, 2003, pg. xiv).

Wuthnow considers the factors that contribute to the interest and stability of religion in America. The interest in religion and spirituality cannot be accounted for simply by suggesting 'some intrinsic need for it' (Wuthnow, 2003, pg. 15). Wuthnow acknowledges that many people are on a 'quest to know God', however, something must give shape to the interior longings and yearnings. People must find what he calls *carriers*, or vehicles of expression which help people make sense of these yearnings (Wuthnow, 2003, pg. 16). For Wuthnow, carries are the key. Wuthnow suggests that the arts have much to do with the interest in spirituality and religion. He writes (Wuthnow, 2003, pg. 16),

On closer consideration, however, the arts may be more conducive to spirituality than first imagined. In fact, *one of the most important reasons that spirituality seems so pervasive in American culture is the publicity it receives because of its presence in the arts.*

Wuthnow then lists theatre shows, literature, painting, sculpture, and museum exhibits as mediums that 'offer the public ample ways of connecting to the sacred' (Wuthnow, 2003, pg. 17). The arts are so influential that many of those interviewed testified that it was experiences of the arts which prompted them to think about and pursue some form of spiritual experience

or religion (Wuthnow, 2003, pg. 18). Wuthnow is clear that the arts are not the only avenue to spirituality or religion, however, 'they are a significant one' (Wuthnow, 2003, 19).

Wuthnow found that the arts contribute to reinforce many people's interest in spirituality. Wuthnow cites Larry Allums, director of the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture (Wuthnow, 2003, pg. 68),

If a person had a healthy artistic life in terms of reflecting on or pondering artistic presences, then that could not help but augment a formally religious presence in his or her life. Art, poetry, painting, music - they really do deal with the sacred, with the spiritual.

Executive director of the New York Foundation for the Arts Ted Berger acknowledges art and spirituality, 'are ways of approaching the secrets of the heart, the secrets of the soul' (Wuthnow, 2003, pg. 68). This concept is also an important mainstay of philosopher Jacques Maritain. Roman Catholic bishop Anthony Pilla notes the similarity between the religion and the arts (Wuthnow, 2003, pg. 69),

They both deal with the spirit of humanity. There should be great complementarity because the arts are one of the manifestations of the glory of God, one of the infinite manifestation of that glory.

Wuthnow acknowledges that this is how the relationship between art and spirituality is *perceived* by the public, but does any evidence exist that this is actually true? This is the question that must be answered at this juncture.

Wuthnow's research reveals that the public rise in spirituality is congruent with the rise of the 'growing exposure to the arts.' People with a greater involvement with art and artistic activities are more likely to be 'seriously committed to spiritual growth.' One key factor is that participation on the arts is 'compatible' in methodology and effect of many accepted devotional practices in religion and spiritual growth (Wuthnow, 2003, pg. 76).

Wuthnow discovered that the experience of art aids in rediscovering the practice of prayer (Wuthnow, 2003, pgs. 83-92), obtaining spiritual direction (Wuthnow, 2003, pgs. 93-102), cultivating spiritual discipline (Wuthnow, 2003, pgs. 103-109), and helping people through times of trial and hardship (Wuthnow, 2003, pgs. 109-113).

Therefore, I maintain that Wuthnow offers evidence that the experiences people have through the medium of art can be explained as experiences of the transcendent. I will propose that Wuthnow validates the claims that art can be a space in which people can encounter transcendence, or even the transcendent God.

6.2 *Robert K. Johnston*

Johnston's work is important because he seeks to find 'constructive theological reflection on how we are to understand' experiences of the transcendent that happen to Christians and non-Christians, outside of the church that do not point to Jesus Christ and his saving work for humanity in any direct way (Johnston, 2014, pg. xv). I maintain that the experiences that Johnston describes are of the same kind and nature as Taylor's experiences of fullness. Therefore, Johnston offers an aesthetic, as well as theological, answer to Taylor's philosophical notion of fullness.

Johnston's concern is to concentrate not on discourse of God through art, rather, he focuses on 'direct encounters with God's "real Presence"' (Johnston, 2014, pg. 1). Theology, for Johnston should be about 'knowing God,' not simply 'knowing about God.' We settle, he contends, for 'intellectual conviction based on philosophical argument' rather than considering deeply actual 'personal experiences with T/transcendence' (Johnston, 2014, pg. 2). This is precisely the trajectory this study intends to follow.

Johnston presents stories of individuals who testify to encounters with the presence of God through the medium of art, including Paul Tillich and C.S. Lewis. These experiences were considered 'foundational' and 'transformative' by those who had them (Johnston, 2014, pgs. 2-3).

I maintain that Johnston's analysis comports well with Taylor's description of the experience of fullness. Johnston terms these experiences 'revelatory' experiences of God. Yet

they are the same kind of experiences as Taylor's experiences of fullness, in that can occur in a variety of activities, events or conditions: while viewing a movie, at the birth of a child, when on a mountain top, when listening to music, or even during a march for justice. Such experiences cannot be 'coerced,' they happen 'randomly' but persistently 'through creation, conscience, and culture.' They cannot be produced by human effort, though they can be 'invited' (Johnston, 2014, pg. 6). In my estimation, this is similar to Taylor's concept of an 'open' take on transcendence; a person must be accepting of the possibility of experiencing transcendence within the immanent frame. It is also the position of Maritain regarding the experience and interpretation of art: one must be open to what the piece may speak.

Johnston resists the 'faulty' definition of general revelation that limits it to 'general truths that are communicated by God to all persons at all times and in all places.' He suggests that a better definition is 'an encounter with the Transcendent that occurs outside the believing community and that is not directly concerned with redemption' (Johnston, 2014, pg. 8).

Johnston is careful to seek validation for his claims. He writes (Johnston, 2014, pg. 46),

The question might be legitimately raised: Though the critics make the claim that film provides viewers an experience of God's revelatory Presence, is there much to substantiate the claim beyond a few anecdotal testimonials by those writing in the field? Have we perhaps confused the religious use of film with a religious experience through film?...What evidence might one adduce to back up the critic's claim that God appears at the movies?

Johnston acknowledges that 'on one level the claim of God's Presence, of epiphany, in the artistic event can't be proven' (Johnston, 2014, pg. 47). Johnston refers to George Steiner¹²¹ when he asserts that there is a sense when, as human beings, we do not fully know what we might be experiencing. Having acknowledged that perhaps we cannot know with absolute certainty that artistic experiences are always numinous, Johnston proceeds to bring forward

¹²¹ From George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pg. 215.

witnesses to such experiences. A ‘secular’ example is Craig Detweiler. Detweiler saw himself in Robert DeNiro’s character Jake LaMotta in the film *Raging Bull*. This ‘numinous’ event precipitated a deeper search for God in Detweiler’s life. This is precisely how Taylor also describes the experience of fullness; it can alert a person to something higher and more profound in life.

Johnston also calls as witnesses his own students. Johnston surveyed his students with questions regarding what they might have experienced during the viewing of a film (Johnston, 2014, pg. 51). One group of respondents said they had no encounter with the divine while viewing a movie. Another group was ‘unsure’ if they had a divine encounter, however the experience was personally transformative. The third group did say that they had a divine encounter, ‘an experience of the holy, which proved transformative in their lives.’ Johnston concludes in the case of the third group ‘their clear sense of discovering themselves to be in the Presence of God, even as, or particularly as, they immersed themselves in the film story itself’ (Johnston, 2014, pg. 52-53).

Therefore, I maintain that Johnston offers validation to the claims of the artists and philosophers from the previous section: art is a space in which people encounter the presence of God within the immanent frame. In my estimation, Johnston’s findings are significant because he is focusing on experiences people have while viewing art outside of the Church setting. This is where Taylor’s experiences of fullness operate as well. Therefore, I maintain that Johnston, like Wuthnow, has demonstrated that the aesthetic experiences people had were actually of T/transcendence. Acknowledging that we human beings may not be able to be absolutely certain in all events that an experience was of T/transcendence, I maintain that Johnston has sufficiently answered the question of validity in the affirmative. People do at times, in fact, experience T/transcendence when viewing and participating in art.

6.3 Conclusion: Aesthetic Experiences Can Be Of Transcendence

Wuthnow and Johnston both aid in advancing the aim of this research. Wuthnow demonstrated that people from a wide and varied demographic spectrum testify to aesthetic experiences of art that can be identified as spiritual, devotional or religious. Art is what gives shape and expression to the spiritual longings within people, and provides a vehicle to more profound spirituality. It even facilitates a connection to the sacred. These experiences of art are described in terms similar to Taylor's descriptions of the experience of fullness. Johnston demonstrated that these kinds of experiences of art share the characteristics of Taylor's experiences of fullness. He adds an important dimension to the discourse by showing that these experiences take place outside the Church. They are aesthetic and artistic experiences and do not directly make reference to Christ or his saving work. However, the testimony of those having these experiences was not that they came to knowledge 'about God,' but rather they encountered God's presence in the aesthetic experience of art. They encountered T/transcendence. Given the above, what I consider to be a wealth of evidence, I offer the conclusion that art, and the aesthetic experience of art can be a medium for the experience of fullness, and ultimately transcendence.

7 Conclusion: Aesthetic Experiences Can Be A Medium

The findings of this chapter were as follows. Fullness is a term coined by Charles Taylor as a generic term that describes a very full or satisfying life, or the kind of life which everyone seeks. Fullness may come through an event, activity or in a condition by which a person feels him- or herself enjoying life to the full. Life, in that punctuated moment, or condition, is as it should be. Fullness is a reflection of transcendence.

Transcendence is best understood through the Augustinian framework of *nearness*. Therefore, the definition of transcendence is *the presence of God as He is manifest within the*

immanent frame. It was testified by artists and philosophers that transcendence, as the presence of God as he is manifested in his nearness, can be experienced in art. Art is a *locus theologicus*, i.e., a theological space in which a person can encounter the presence of God through an aesthetic experience of art.

Taylor desires to keep the discussion of fullness and transcendence within modern philosophical discourse. The aim of this study is to take Taylor a step further and attempt to locate a bridge that spans the gap between Taylor's philosophical notion of the experience of fullness and the theological concept of people connecting with, or moving toward, the transcendent God, through the aesthetic experience of art. This chapter presented such a bridge.

Moreover, if the presence of God can be encountered in artistic and aesthetic spaces, then art and aesthetic experiences of art can be a medium which may aid secular unbelievers move toward the transcendent God.

In these first three chapters, we set the scene for the possibility of an aesthetic experience of art being a medium for an experience of fullness. In the next chapter, we will examine the theological core of the study. We will explore *why* this is possible by positing that Neo-Thomist anthropology offers a picture of the human being as *imago Dei* - the kind of being that can have such experiences. Following that, we will delve into a theory of art that explains *how* such experiences are possible through an aesthetic experience of art.

To Thomas we now turn.

Neo-Thomist Anthropology as the Theological Bridge to Fullness

Taylor's notion of fullness states that a person can experience fullness in an 'activity or condition' (Taylor, 2007, pg. 5). This dissertation proposes that aesthetic experiences of works of art can be such an activity. However, Taylor leaves the door open for the question, 'Why is this so?' Neo-Thomist anthropology offers a framework: humanity is created *imago Dei*. This chapter will briefly explore several aspects of Aquinas' understanding of *imago Dei* to provide the dissertation's theological core. These themes suggest why a human being can experience fullness.

Perhaps more importantly, Neo-Thomist anthropology allows this study to take a step further than Taylor's notion of fullness. Human beings can experience genuine encounters with God through aesthetic experiences of works of art because they are *imago Dei*. Subsequent chapters will build on this Neo-Thomist anthropology as it is contained in the theory of art developed by Jacques Maritain to demonstrate that art can be a medium for the experience of fullness and an experience of the transcendent God.

Two aspects of Aquinas' anthropology will demonstrate that human beings are capable of experiencing fullness. First, according to Aquinas, all human beings desire *happiness*. Happiness can be experienced at two levels. *Imperfect happiness* is what any person can experience through many pleasurable experiences available in life. No special grace is required. On the other hand, *perfect happiness* is the experience of God in the fullness of his essence in the next life. This experience is reserved for the blessed in heaven. According to Aquinas, imperfect happiness is a reflection of perfect happiness. By experiencing imperfect happiness, a person can be alerted to the higher and more profound reality of the experience of perfect happiness. Through an experience of imperfect happiness,

a desire or an aspiration for something or someone, higher and beyond the self - perfect happiness - can be ignited. It will be demonstrated that Aquinas' notion of imperfect happiness anticipates Taylor's notion of fullness.

Second, human beings are *passionate* creatures. They can be moved deeply, in potentially life-changing ways, by experiences of external objects and events. Aquinas anticipates Taylor's description of the experience of fullness when he describes how the passions are aroused when a person encounters what is perceived to be the good; it ignites an initial, intuitive, or passionate response, particularly that of *love*. The object seen and experienced may now be pursued and obtained. What drives a person toward the perceived good are the passions. It will be demonstrated later in this study that art operates at the same level in the human person. The person experiencing fullness and a person aroused passionately by art are having experiences of a similar nature.

Then this study will show that Thomist anthropology allows for a person to have a genuine experience of fullness through an aesthetic experience of works of art that contributes to furthering of the arts as a missional medium in Roman Catholic thought.

However, Aquinas allows us to move beyond Taylor's notion of the experience of fullness. Two other aspects of Aquinas' concept of humanity as *imago Dei* make it possible for human beings to have genuine experiences of God through aesthetic experiences of works of art. In section four, Aquinas calls human beings the *horizon between heaven and earth* or the bridge between the spiritual and the material. Such a constitution allows humanity to access, understand and participate in the spiritual and physical realities of the created cosmos, heaven and earth. The theory of art articulated later in this study by Neo-Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain will draw on this concept, thus locating the origin of creating and viewing of art in the transcendent.

In section five, according to Aquinas, all people have a *natural desire* for God. Why speak about art being a medium for an experience of transcendence or God if human beings do not want God, as secularization theory may claim? Yet, according to Thomist anthropology, God has arranged the human person in such a form that all people have a desire for God, whether or not they realize this fact or can articulate it. Therefore, I will maintain that aesthetic experiences of art can awaken this desire.

1 Aquinas on Happiness

1.1 *The Teleological Nature of Happiness*

Aquinas states in the Prologue of the Treatise on Happiness that happiness is the intended end for humanity as *imago Dei*, i.e., intelligent beings endowed with free will and self-movement. The treatise focuses on what constitutes happiness and how it is attained. When considering happiness, Aquinas begins at the end. Human beings, as *imago Dei* are creatures whose intended ultimate end is happiness. Happiness is teleological.¹²² This is an essential first principle. Human beings act with purpose and intention toward an end. Human beings are teleological beings.

Question one of the Treatise includes eight articles in which Aquinas looks more deeply into aspects of human actions towards an end.¹²³ Essential for this discussion is article six, in which Aquinas claims that human beings direct their motives, emotions, desires and will toward their last end. Aquinas quotes Augustine, who says, in Taylor's language, people

¹²² Question 1 of the Treatise deals with the question of man's last end, *ST I-II*, q. 1. All citations of Aquinas derive from *St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica Complete English Edition in Five Volumes*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame: Christian Classics, 1948).

¹²³ The line of questioning is as follows: Article 1: Is acting with a purpose a feature of human nature? Article 2: Is this due to our nature as rational beings? Article 3: Can we classify human actions into specific kinds of actions according to the purpose? Article 4: Does there exist an ultimate purpose for human life? Article five: Can a person have more than one ultimate purpose? Article six: Are all desires and willing directed toward a man's last end? Article seven: Do all persons desire the same ultimate end? Article eight: Do non-human creatures share the same ultimate end with human beings?

make qualitative distinctions when considering the good and their last end.¹²⁴ Human beings act thus because ‘whatever man desires, he desires under the aspect of the good.’¹²⁵ Aquinas accepts that all human beings strive toward a particular end, which is the attainment of happiness. This is not to suggest that a person is conscious of pursuing happiness as the immediate end of every action or activity. Van Nieuwenhove notes that happiness is active at a more ‘transcendent level’ and provides a principle orientation to life.¹²⁶ Aquinas and Taylor agree that human beings are teleological beings; the desired end is the good, and people make qualitative distinctions in their pursuit of the (perceived) good as an end.

What Taylor describes as fullness is an iteration of Thomas Aquinas’ theory of happiness. Taylor has been on this Thomist trajectory all along, at least in the sense that *some* people inhabiting the immanent frame *are* seeking something, some form of fullness or happiness. As this study noted earlier, Taylor is looking for the best account of the kind of life a human being can live or the type of condition a human being can reach. Aquinas’ treatise on happiness moves along that same trajectory.

The human person is constituted of body, soul, spirit, mind, will, and emotions. The experience of fullness must include each of these aspects of the human person if the experience is to be, in fact, *full*. What Taylor refers to when describing fullness aligns with what Thomas calls *happiness*. J. Budziszewski suggests that ‘flourishing’ better clarifies Thomas’ concept, which puts Thomas and Taylor again in the same philosophical and phenomenological space. He describes it thus,¹²⁷

The term happiness, which is unavoidable in this book, gives but a pale and pallid sense of what St. Thomas is talking about. Expressions such as “blessedness” and “supreme happiness” convey fair expressions of its meaning; the expression “flourishing” would be even better, only if we keep in mind that the sort of flourishing we are thinking about is neither that of a plant, like a cabbage or artichoke,

¹²⁴ ‘On the contrary, Augustine says, (*De Civ. Dei* xix. 1) That is the end of our good, for the sake of which we love other things, whereas we love it for its own sake,’ art. 6, co.

¹²⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 1, art. 6, ans.

¹²⁶ Rik van Nieuwenhove, *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pg. 188.

¹²⁷ J. Budziszewski, *Commentary on Thomas Aquinas’ Treatise on Happiness and Ultimate Purpose*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2020), pg. 8.

nor of that of an animal, like a cat or a turtle, but that of an embodied rational being who has dominion over his [or her] own actions.

Thomas does not define happiness as mere pleasure. Budziszewski again,

From a Thomistic point of view, those who say that happiness is not the ultimate purpose, or that happiness is not an end in itself, are usually making at least one of two mistakes. Either they are confusing happiness with pleasure, and saying that pleasure is not an end in itself, which is true... Or else they are failing to distinguish the ultimate purpose in the sense of the thing itself that is to be attained (which is God) with the ultimate purpose in the sense of the attainment or enjoyment of that thing (Budziszewski, 2020, pg. 8).

Budziszewski captures what Aquinas makes clear: the ultimate, perfect happiness consists of seeing, knowing and experiencing God in his essence (1 John 3:2) - the thing itself - and the necessary, simultaneous activity of *enjoying* God in that condition. Kevin O'Reilly confirms the Thomistic pursuit for happiness terminates only in God. He writes,¹²⁸

Aquinas is quite clear that God has created the human soul and imbued it with a structure whereby it necessarily desires that happiness which is ultimately realized in the beatific vision.

1.2 Perfect Happiness

Aquinas distinguishes between two types of happiness: perfect happiness and imperfect happiness.¹²⁹ He uses two Latin words to distinguish between these two types: *felicitas* and *beatitudo*. Both Latin words can be rendered by the English happiness. When using *felicitas* Aquinas relates to the kind of happiness that can be enjoyed in this life on earth. Aquinas calls this *imperfect happiness*. Brian Davies notes that when Aquinas uses *beatitudo* he refers to the ultimate happiness that is experienced by the saints in the presence of God, or in union with God, in heaven.¹³⁰ Thomas refers to this as *perfect happiness*. Perfect happiness is the 'complete good' for a human being.¹³¹ Perfect happiness consists in

¹²⁸ Kevin O'Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception: A Thomistic Perspective* (Four Courts Press, 2007), pg. 100.

¹²⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 3, art. 2. For an in-depth presentation of Aquinas' thinking regarding the two types of happiness, see, Henri de Lubac, "*Duplex Hominis Beatitudo*," *Communio (USA)*, vol. 35, no. 4, (2008), pgs. 599-612.

¹³⁰ Brian Davies, "Happiness," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, eds. Brian Davies and Eleanor Stump, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pg. 233. See also: Joseph Stenberg, "Aquinas on Happiness," University of Colorado, 2016, pg. 5.

¹³¹ *ST* I-II, q. 3, art. 2, obj. 2.

the enjoyment of the ultimate end for human beings: knowing and loving God¹³² since the end of all things is God himself.¹³³ Joseph Stenberg notes that, according to Aquinas, the ‘underlying structure’ of happiness, in the most general sense, is that a person can be considered ‘happy if and only if and because she is [1] engaged in and [2] enjoying [3] a genuinely good activity.’¹³⁴

The connection between perfect and imperfect happiness is an important one. Perfect happiness is the model or paradigm for imperfect happiness. How do we know what it is to be imperfectly happy? We compare it to perfect happiness. Imperfect happiness, inversely, ‘partakes of some particular likeness of [perfect] happiness.’¹³⁵ Aquinas is adamant that human beings cannot find perfect happiness in this life. Stephen Wang notes that according to Aquinas, perfect happiness in this life is, in principle, an ‘impossible idea.’¹³⁶ Imperfect happiness *points* a person toward perfect happiness. Thomas anticipates Taylor’s case that fullness (as some measure of happiness in life here) is an activity or condition that points a person toward something, or someone, higher and more profound (Taylor, 2007, pg. 5). Perfect happiness, *beatitudo*, is the experience of the ultimate good. Aquinas explains, ‘Wherefore, since [perfect] happiness is nothing else but the attainment of the highest good, it cannot be without concomitant delight.’¹³⁷ Aquinas cites 1 John 3:2 to give a framework for his definition of perfect happiness.¹³⁸ For Aquinas, this Scripture is a template and paradigm for life in this world, and as the ultimate end of human beings. Thomas also employs this

¹³² *ST* I-II, q. 1, art. 8, ans.

¹³³ *ST* I, q. 103, art. 1 and art. 2.

¹³⁴ Joseph Stenberg “Aquinas on Happiness,” Boulder, CO: University of Colorado (2016), pg. 8.

¹³⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 3, art. 6, ans.

¹³⁶ Stephan Wang, “Aquinas on Human Happiness and the Natural Desire For God,” *New Blackfriars* vol. 88., no. 1015, May 2007, pg. 322-334 [328].

¹³⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 4, art. 1, con.

¹³⁸ ‘Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is (ESV),’ *ST* I-II, q. 3, art. 8. Thomas cites 1 John 3:2 twelve times in the *Summa: Supplement to III*, q. 92, art. 1, *sed contra*; I-II, q. 3, art. 8, *sed contra*; I, q. 4, art. 3, *sed contra*; I, q. 12, art. 5, ans.; I, q. 12, art., 6, obj. 1; I-II, q. 3, art. 8, *sed contra*; I-II, q. 69, art. 2, obj. 3; II-II, q. 1, art. 2, rep. obj. 3; II-II, q. 19, art. 11, obj. 2; II-II, q. 52, art. 3, obj. 3; II-II, q. 181, art. 4, rep. obj. 2, III, q. 45, art. 4, ans.

passage to describe salvation. The goal of salvation is to enjoy God now as his children, to become (like) him in this life - a journey that finds completion in the next life - and to experience and enjoy him in his essence as our final end. Perfect happiness consists in the activity of both *contemplating* the vision of the Divine Essence - or *encountering* God in his very essence - and the *enjoyment* of that experience of God. Thomas clearly states that happiness, by which he means perfect happiness, does not consist in a general revelation of God, or what Thomas calls ‘the knowledge of God which is possessed generally by the majority.’¹³⁹

A significant point emerges from Aquinas’ thought. First, perfect happiness is *an experience*, albeit a perfect experience by perfected saints in heaven. The person, having been perfected, experiences God in his essence in the person’s own [perfected] body, soul, spirit, mind, will, and emotions. He writes,¹⁴⁰

The object of the will, that is the human appetite, is the Good without reserve, just as the object of the mind is the True without reserve. Clearly then, nothing can satisfy man’s will except such goodness, which is found, not in any created thing, but in God alone.

Sternberg describes it as an ‘intimate’ vision or experience of God,¹⁴¹ or union with God in one ‘everlasting operation.’¹⁴² Second, this experience of the essence of God is perfect happiness because it is the experience of the ultimate good (God himself) and fulfils the three criteria for happiness: 1) the active involvement of the person, the subject, 2) the enjoyment of the object and activity 3) a genuinely good activity, performed perfectly. Imperfect happiness will be only a ‘likeness to’ or a ‘participation in’ perfect happiness.¹⁴³ Perfect happiness can only be experienced by the saints in heaven in the life to come and is not

¹³⁹ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 3, chapter 38.

¹⁴⁰ *ST I-II*, q. 2, art 8.

¹⁴¹ Sternberg, “Aquinas on Happiness,” pg. 30.

¹⁴² *ST I-II*, q. 3, art. 2, ad 4: ‘But in men, according to their present state of life, the final perfection is in respect of an operation whereby man is united to God: but this operation neither can be continual, nor, consequently, is it one only, because operation is multiplied by being discontinued. And for this reason in the present state of life, perfect happiness cannot be attained by man...Consequently in regard to this perfect happiness, the object fails: because in the state of happiness, man’s mind will be united to God by one, continual, everlasting operation.’

¹⁴³ *ST I-II*, q. 3, art. 6, co; *ST I-II*, q. 5, art. 3, con.

possible in this life.¹⁴⁴ This is not a remarkable conclusion. The intimate experience of God in his essence by perfected people in heaven seems self-evident that it cannot be experienced by imperfect people in an imperfect world.

1.3 *Imperfect Happiness*

Imperfect happiness is but a reflection of perfect happiness. Remember that Taylor previously identified the sense of fullness as a ‘reflection of transcendent reality’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 769). Experiencing imperfect happiness here on earth may alert a person that something deeper and more profound is to be found *beyond* ordinary human life. Thus, imperfect happiness can orientate a person’s life, loves, passions, emotions, and will to the greater and the deeper, should a person so choose, even if perfect happiness remains for the future eternal life. The participation and experience of imperfect happiness, while pleasurable to some degree, is ultimately found wanting. Karl Rahner would insist that, in this life, ‘all symphonies remain unfinished.’¹⁴⁵ Henri De Lubac summarizes the distinction between imperfect and perfect happiness,¹⁴⁶

In a word, the first [imperfect happiness] is immanent - at once worldly or temporal and acquired according to internal principles; the second [perfect happiness] is transcendent - at once heavenly and received according to divine grace. Beatitude is twofold: the first is ‘natural,’ and the second is ‘supernatural.’

According to Aquinas, imperfect happiness requires several things in order to be achieved: a physical body,¹⁴⁷ with reasonable health¹⁴⁸ enough external goods to live and work fairly comfortably,¹⁴⁹ a life focused on works of virtue and enjoyment of activities,¹⁵⁰ and friends.¹⁵¹ These things a person uses in life are truly good, and possessing these things

¹⁴⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 3, art. 8.

¹⁴⁵ Karl Rahner, *Servants of the Lord*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), pg. 152.

¹⁴⁶ Henri de Lubac, “*Duplex hominis beatitudo*,” pg. 609.

¹⁴⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 4, art. 5, ans.

¹⁴⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 5, art. 6.

¹⁴⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 4, art. 7, ans.

¹⁵⁰ *ST* I-II, q. 4, art. 7, ans.

¹⁵¹ *ST* I-II, q. 4, art. 8.

can make for a good life. However, imperfect happiness consists of moments that punctuate the ordinary, daily life. Taylor follows this line of thought when describing the notion of fullness.

1.4 *Delight is Necessary*

As mentioned above, the necessary components of happiness are 1) the active involvement of the person, the subject, 2) the enjoyment of the object and activity, and 3) a genuinely good activity. The third point is relevant to this study. *Affective delight* follows upon happiness as a necessary corollary: ‘every delight is a proper accident resulting from happiness.’¹⁵² In other words, *enjoyment* is necessary to experience happiness. If a person does not find delight in the object or activity, then according to Aquinas, that person cannot be considered happy or to be experiencing happiness. Moreover, the activity being enjoyed must be a genuinely good activity. A person may find that doing evil is, to some extent pleasurable, but that person cannot be considered to be happy.¹⁵³

I maintain that three conclusions can be drawn from Thomas’ insistence that enjoyment and delight are necessary. These conclusions are essential because they align with Taylor’s notion of the experience of fullness. First, enjoyment and delight involve a whole-person experience; it is not only a person’s mental or intellectual capacity that experiences delight and enjoyment. All of the affections, passions, desires and faculties are involved. This comports with Taylor’s description of the experience of fullness as one which produces ‘a condition of peace or wholeness’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 5). Similarly, in the experience of fullness the entire person is brought into ‘alignment’ and feels ‘united’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 6).

Second, delight and enjoyment are required to classify the experience as one of

¹⁵² *ST* I-II, q. 2, art. 6 and *ST* I-II, q. 2, art. 6, rep., obj. 1.

¹⁵³ *ST* I-II, q. 2, art 6 and *ST* I-II, q. 3, art. 4, ans.

happiness. Similarly, Taylor's notion of the experience of fullness also evokes delight and pleasure. In the experience of fullness, a person momentarily enjoys life as it should be (Taylor, 2007, pg. 5).

Third, Aquinas is a moderate realist; in the experience of happiness a person truly encounters a real *something* that exists in a real world, outside himself.¹⁵⁴ Delight and enjoyment require a real connection to the desired object. As Aquinas explains, delight (*delectatio*) requires two things, 'union' or 'conjunction' (*coniunctio*) with the good object and the 'perception' or 'comprehension' (*perception*) of the union.¹⁵⁵ A person must be in the presence of the good object, united to it, and the person must also grasp the reality of the encounter. Aquinas says that enjoyment is when we delight and we possess the good we desire and we rest in its possession.¹⁵⁶ As Mark P. Drost expresses it, 'delight requires presence.'¹⁵⁷ It is possible for a person to envision a loved object and to reflect longingly and affectionately upon it, but *delight* and *enjoyment* of the loved object requires presence and encounter. This concept of delight comports with Taylor's notion of fullness. An experience of fullness does not occur only in the mind; a person experiences something - or *someone* - outside of the self. He or she is deeply moved by the affections because the encounter is genuine.

1.5 Two Critical Questions

In light of the analysis above, two critical questions should be posed. First, does everyone desire happiness? Both Taylor and Aquinas answer this question in the affirmative. For Taylor, the notion of fullness is embodied in the question, 'What does it mean to live the

¹⁵⁴ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Thomist Common Sense: The Philosophy of Being and the Development of Doctrine*, trans. Matthew K. Miner, Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2021), pgs. 54, 96.

¹⁵⁵ *ST I-II*, q. 35, art. 1, ans.

¹⁵⁶ *ST I-II*, q. 35, art. 6, ans.

¹⁵⁷ Mark P. Drost, 'In the Realm of the Senses: Saint Thomas Aquinas on Sensory Love, Desire, and Delight,' *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, vol. 59, no. 1, (Jan., 1995), pg. 58.

good life or to live well? As Taylor argues in *Sources of the Self*, everyone asks questions about what the good life is. Similarly, in Aquinas' thinking, every human being desires happiness. Aquinas follows Aristotle in affirming that all things aim toward the good, or that every agent acts for some good.¹⁵⁸ Aquinas addresses explicitly this critique. The first objection raised against the hypothesis that all people desire happiness is that not *every* person can desire happiness because some people do not know what happiness truly is, so they cannot desire it.¹⁵⁹ Thomas responds by recognizing that people indeed have differing views of what constitutes happiness, but this does not indicate that these people do not *desire* happiness. Most people consider the definition of happiness to be the condition in which all desires and wishes are fulfilled. Thomas affirms that every person desires at least this much. Undoubtedly, not every person understands that his or her intended end is perfect happiness in seeing, knowing, experiencing and enjoying God in his essence. So in this regard, not every person desires happiness. This comports with Taylor's picture of inhabitants of the secular age. Every person desires a measure of happiness, or fullness, or a life worth living, and pursues that desire in various ways. People may not know precisely what they desire, but they know they desire *something* that may bring meaning to life.

The second critical question is, can a person be happy without God? According to Thomas, imperfect happiness can be experienced in this life by both believers and unbelievers. No special grace is required to experience a measure of imperfect happiness.¹⁶⁰ Taylor argues as much when he notes that every person, and every society, lives according to some concept of human flourishing, no matter how accurate or askew (Taylor, 2007, pg. 16). He claims that people can inhabit three such kinds of lives: fullness, exile and the middle space (Taylor, 2007, pg. 16). The middle space is the place of stability, order and routine. The

¹⁵⁸ *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk I.1; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk 3, chapter 16; *ST I-II*, q. 23, art. 2.

¹⁵⁹ *ST I-II*, q. 5, art. 8., obj. 1.

¹⁶⁰ *ST I-II*, q. 5, art. 5, ans.

life of vocation, family and ordinary activities can provide a measure of meaning and happiness. Both believers and unbelievers can experience this. Taylor makes this case in *Sources of the Self* when he claims the affirmation of ordinary life is the very centre of the good life (Taylor, 1989, pg. 13); everyone has access to morality, freedom and fullness, or happiness. So it seems that a person could enjoy some level of happiness without knowing God. However, Taylor has suggested that all people have an ineradicable bent toward transcendence and Aquinas posits that all people seek the good. This implies that temporal satisfaction in life may not last long.

Yet, imperfect happiness and fullness can point those enjoying ordinary life to something more profound. Imperfect happiness is not a matter of the whole for the earthly life. Stenberg says that imperfect happiness is ‘episodic.’¹⁶¹ This is so for Aquinas because if the structure of happiness includes the enjoyment of the object and activity, then one cannot enjoy a good activity endlessly; minimally, a person would need to at some point change activities. A person is not imperfectly happy when they are asleep or ill or unable to perform the activity that makes them happy.¹⁶² The episodic nature of imperfect happiness is similar to Taylor’s idea that fullness is a punctuated moment in life that alerts us to something beyond life.

1.6 Fullness In A Thomist Category

The importance of Aquinas’ concept of imperfect happiness is that it can point to a deeper and more perfect life of perfect happiness.¹⁶³ Imperfect happiness experienced in this world is but ‘flashes and glimpses’ of perfect happiness.¹⁶⁴ Moments in the imperfectly happy life are a participation or a likeness of perfect happiness. Believers and unbelievers alike

¹⁶¹ Stenberg, “Aquinas on Happiness,” pg., 100.

¹⁶² *ST* I-II, q. 5, art. 4.

¹⁶³ *ST* I-II, q. 3, art. 6, ans.; *ST* I-II, q. 5, art. 3, ans.

¹⁶⁴ Budziszewski, xxviii.

desire happiness. These are the kinds of ideas that Taylor puts forward in his concept of fullness. Therefore, I maintain that Taylor's concept of fullness and Aquinas's concept of imperfect happiness are similar.

2 The Passions

The passions are an aspect of Neo-Thomist anthropology that can aid in bridging the gap between Taylor's suggestions that modern people seek fullness and transcendence and how that is experienced through works of art. The conclusion that will be drawn is that works of art impact a person at the level of the passions first and foremost. Aesthetic experiences of works of art capture a person by their passions. Therefore, the psychosomatic responses of the passions to outside stimuli, such as aesthetic experiences of art, are similar to a person's experience of fullness.

The passions are the faculties of our humanity that are aroused or ignited toward an object that seems fitting or suitable for human beings. Something out there impinges upon a person and the change in bodily physiology is called a passion.¹⁶⁵ Thomas Ryan explains, 'Emotions are a form of affective cognition in that they are an awareness of, and reaction to objects perceived as good or bad.'¹⁶⁶

The passions are a movement, change or alteration in the subject. In Aquinas' terms, the soul is 'moved.' A person is affected by something that causes a physiological and psychological change. Since a person is a body/soul unity, they will be affected spiritually, emotionally, and bodily. According to Claudia Eisen Murphy the passions begin in the senses, internal and external, yet always include a physical or physiological reaction or

¹⁶⁵ Aquinas writes, 'I answer that, Passion is the effect of the agent on the patient,' *ST I-II*, q. 26, art 2, ans.

¹⁶⁶ Thomas Ryan, 'Revisiting Affective Knowledge and Connaturality in Aquinas,' *Theological Studies* 66 (2005), pg. 52.

change in the person.¹⁶⁷ The emotions, or passions, then produce a response to the object perceived as good. Aquinas calls these *affections*, or *affectus*.¹⁶⁸ The affections and emotions of the intellectual appetite include the will. Thus, the emotion, through the object, moves the will, and the loved object is pursued.¹⁶⁹ Robert Minor compares the human subject to a traveller on a quest.¹⁷⁰ He describes the person who is now orientated in a direction and must pursue that direction until the end is reached. Thus, passion is properly found where there is bodily change, effect, or *transmutation*. However, the fittingness of the object is rationally judged to be so. The passions, or emotions, are then guided and completed by reason.

Aquinas' concept of the passions comports well with Taylor's description of a person who pursues the Good Life or experiences fullness. A person is driven by the desire to obtain what is perceived to be good, fitting, or beneficial. A recognition of a good can be obtained during the experience of fullness. However, this drive to pursue is not solely cognition-based. A person must be moved deeply. Taylor's theory of the pursuit of the Good Life and the experience of fullness implicitly contains an accompanying moving of the passions. The experience creates a desire, or a love for the object.

The first response to the Good is *Love*.¹⁷¹ Diana Fritz Cates notes that Aquinas employs love in several ways. His most basic meaning is the tendency a thing has to actualize itself in ways that are fitting or beneficial.¹⁷² Love is the passion that registers that the thing out there is fitting or suitable given the kind of being that a person is i.e., according to nature,

¹⁶⁷ Claudia Eisen Murphy, 'Aquinas on Our Responsibility for Our Emotions,' *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* vol. 8, no. 2 (1999), pg. 167: 'In its strictest sense, the word *passio* means an undergoing, for which the proper philosophical analysis yields the more precise 'alteration': the losing of property and the acquiring of the contrary. In its strictest, a *passio* cannot be in the soul, because alteration can only be in material things and the soul is not material. But it can be in the body (for example, an illness or a cut) and be perceived by the soul.'

¹⁶⁸ *ST* I, q. 82, art., 5, ad. 1; also, I, q. 20, art. 1, ad 1.

¹⁶⁹ *ST* I-II, q. 9, art. 2.

¹⁷⁰ Robert Minor, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pg. 41.

¹⁷¹ *ST* I-II, q. 26, art 1.

¹⁷² Diana Fritz Cates, *Aquinas on the Emotions: A Religious-Ethical Inquiry*, (Washington, D.C.; Georgetown University Press, 2009), pg. 106.

or *connaturality*. Love is the natural inclination to move toward what is (perceived to be) fitting for us as human beings.

I maintain that Aquinas' language of 'love' and the pursuit of what is 'fitting' or 'suitable' describes psychosomatic reaction similar to Taylor's notion of fullness. Taylor is implicitly in Thomist space. Taylor has described fullness as a reflection of transcendence. The experience of fullness is thus profoundly moving and inspiring; it can be in moments of great joy and fulfilment. Fullness can be a condition in which life is fuller, richer and deeper. In such a moment, a person will *feel* united, moving forward, suddenly capable and full of energy. The person has caught a glimpse of what life could be, has partaken of the higher and more profound and now desires more. The Neo-Thomist reply would be that this is true because the passions have been aroused. An object that was perceived as fitting, as a connatural good, was experienced, and a desire for that object has been conceived in the person. A love for the object has captured the person at a deep interior level, and that object must now be pursued. The experience of fullness does not occur without moving the passions.

3 *Imago Dei*: From Aquinas to Aesthetic Experiences of Art

Roman Catholic teaching has given significant shape to Aquinas' understanding of *Imago Dei*, which contributes to an aesthetic and theological answer to Taylor's notion of fullness. First, Roman Catholic thought does not default to a concept such as Common Grace to explain how unregenerate persons can work for the good and the beautiful. The human employment of wisdom and creativity allows humanity to create and advance culture, even as human beings remain corrupted. The Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* affirms the possibility of human achievement,¹⁷³

¹⁷³ *Gaudium et Spes* 57; see: *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:22; 8:5; chapter 9.

When man works in the fields of philosophy, history, mathematics, and science, and cultivates the arts, he can greatly contribute towards bringing the human race to a higher understanding of truth, goodness and beauty, to points of view having universal value; thus man will be more clearly enlightened by that wondrous Wisdom, which was with God from all eternity, working beside Him like a master craftsman.

Second, Roman Catholic theology affirms that all human persons, due to their nature as *imago Dei*, participate in the light and power of the Spirit and can, by reason, understand to a limited degree, the created order. By free will, humanity is capable of directing itself toward that end (CCC 1704). Human beings can seek and pursue what they perceive to be the good. Humanity has the capability to create art and culture that is not all bad or evil, but rather beneficial. This creative ability is not restricted to regenerate persons; it is the possession of humanity as *imago Dei* (CCC 1718).

Motivated by this understanding of *imago Dei* Pope John Paul II penned a letter to artists (1999).¹⁷⁴ In this letter, John Paul II included a section titled, ‘The artist and the common good’ (article 4). Here the Pope encourages artists from all nations to be obedient to their inspiration to create, for in doing so, artists ‘render an exceptional social service in favour of the common good.’ John Paul II also recognizes that artists, through their work reveal the ‘epiphanies of beauty’ (Prologue, article 10) and of the ‘inner beauty of things’ (article 6). He writes,

Every genuine art form in its own way is a path to the inmost reality of man and of the world. It is therefore a wholly valid approach to the realm of faith, which gives human experience its ultimate meaning. That is why the Gospel fullness of truth was bound from the beginning to stir the interest of artists, who by their very nature are alert to every “epiphany” of the inner beauty of things.

John Paul’s closing exhortation includes,

It is with this in mind that I appeal to you, artists of the written and spoken word, of the theatre and music, of the plastic arts and the most recent technologies in the field of communication. I appeal especially to you, Christian artists: I wish to remind each of you that, beyond functional considerations, the close alliance that has always existed between the Gospel and art means that you are invited to use your creative intuition to enter into the heart of the mystery of the Incarnate God and at the same time into the mystery of man.

John Paul is in the same linguistic and phenomenological space as Taylor (Taylor, 1989, pg.

¹⁷⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Artists*, 1999; https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html; accessed 20 June, 2024.

419; Chapter Two, section 3.3 of this dissertation) and Jacques Maritain's concept of *creative intuition* (Chapter Five).

Therefore, I maintain that Neo-Thomist anthropology provides a sufficient theological framework for the experience of fullness.

However, this only takes the aim of this study halfway. The aim of this study is to find a bridge that connects Taylor's concept of fullness with the theological concept regarding how secular people might connect with the transcendent God through art. Neo-Thomist anthropology allows this study to take that step beyond Taylor's notion of fullness. Human beings, because they are *imago Dei* can connect with or move toward God through genuine encounters with God through aesthetic experiences of works of art. This is because humanity is the horizon between heaven and earth, and everyone has a natural desire for God. To this we now turn.

4 Humanity Is the Horizon Between Heaven And Earth.

Aquinas describes it thus,

For humanity is, as it were, the horizon and boundary of the spiritual and the bodily natures, and, as though a middle between the two, participates in both bodily and spiritual goodness.¹⁷⁵

Aquinas makes this declaration when discussing the mystery of the incarnation and its 'abundant fruit.' Citing Ecclesiastes 1:7,¹⁷⁶ Aquinas argues that the natural goods of the world are streams that flow to us as gifts from God. It is in humanity, the human person, that the perfection of the divine goodness and its 'unfailing communication' is 'found (*inveniuntur*),' 'brought together,' or 'whole (*aggregate*).' Humanity is like a middle space between the two dimensions of the cosmos because humanity is constituted as body and soul, spiritual and material. Aquinas terms this *hylomorphic*. In the hierarchy of being, humans are

¹⁷⁵ III *Sent.*, Prologue; <https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~Sent.III>; accessed 3 August, 2023.

¹⁷⁶ 'To the place where the streams flow, there they flow again,' *Ad locum unde exeunt, flumina revertuntur ut iterum fluant.*

the only things in the universe possessing a material and spiritual constitution. God and angels are pure spirit, and animals and plants are material. Human beings are body and soul. Humanity is a similitude of ‘*the whole creation*’ as in Mark 16:15.¹⁷⁷ Aquinas agrees with Orthodox anthropology that humanity is a microcosm of the universe. However, Aquinas does not employ the language as the Orthodox do.¹⁷⁸

In other words, humanity, as *hylomorphic* creatures, consisting of the composite of body and soul, does not simply inhabit the material world; it is capable of reflecting upon it and its existence in it. A human being can discern order within the cosmos and thus derive meaning from it. A human being can, therefore, interpret life and existence within the cosmos. Having interpreted life, however imperfectly, human beings can then act decisively within the world. The united cosmos furnishes humanity with the meaning of and in the world.¹⁷⁹

Human beings can also discern, reflect upon and interpret the things and realities of the spiritual realm, particularly God. All human beings have the desire and capacity for God (whether or not they know it), because he is the ultimate purpose and meaning of human life. Tina Beattie describes the hylomorphic *imago Dei* as grounded in the Trinitarian God, who is himself a unity of three persons who express selfless, communicative and creative love for the good of the world. The human person (body and soul) manifests this love in its capacity to understand, interpret and engage the world for the good. It is this divinely aided human

¹⁷⁷ Aquinas cites Mark 16:15, ‘*preach the gospel to the whole creation*,’ which he interprets as all human beings; III *Sent.*, Prologue.

¹⁷⁸ Bishop Kallistos Ware describes humanity as a ‘microcosm’ or ‘mirror’ of the entire cosmos, an *imago mundi*. He writes, ‘All created things have their meeting place in man.’ In humanity, the spiritual is manifested in and through the material. These are precisely Aquinas’ thoughts as well, although he expressed them in slightly different terminology. See: Ware, *The Orthodox Way, Revised edition* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), pg. 49-50.

¹⁷⁹ Modern philosophy, following Descartes and Kant reverses the process. Humanity obtains information about the world from ‘the ground up,’ meaning beginning from human reason and rationality. Humanity, and the human mind do not derive truth and meaning *from* the objectivity of the world, rather, the mind *imposes* meaning upon the world. See: Tina Beattie, “Thomas Aquinas, part 5: what does it mean to be human?” *The Guardian* 27 February, 2012; <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2012/feb/27/thomas-aquinas-what-does-it-mean-to-be-human>, accessed 9 August, 2023.

capacity to receive and communicate this divine love to the world that most aptly expresses the image.¹⁸⁰ Human beings are the hylomorphic vehicles and purveyors of divine love and communication for the good of the world. The human person, as the bridge between heaven and earth, is created and designed to make the life and love of God for and in the world real by participating in the life and love of God and acting as *imago Dei*.

Consequently, if humanity is the horizon and boundary between heaven and earth, then art and works of art can be the threshold. Works of art are said to be ‘God’s grandchild.’¹⁸¹ Therefore, I maintain that human creativity, expressed in art and works of art, can be a means and medium through which human connection with the divine is possible.

5 The Natural Desire for God

God is pursuing and reaching out to every person in the world.¹⁸² God desires to be known and experienced as the Love that he is. God has taken the initiative to form a relationship with him. This is the human *telos*: to know and experience God.¹⁸³ Moreover, every person has a desire for God and for this relationship with him that God himself has initiated. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC 27) describes it thus,

The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will a person find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for: ‘The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God.’

Aquinas affirms this concept.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Dante Alighieri, *The Portable Dante*, ed. Mark Musa, pg. 60. From *Inferno*, Canto XI, 105:

‘[H]ow your art, too, as best it can, imitates Nature,
the way an apprentice does his master;
so your art may be said to be God’s grandchild.’

¹⁸² John Wesley, ‘The Scripture Way of Salvation,’ and CCC, article 27.

¹⁸³ ST, I-II, q. 1, art. 8, ans., ‘For man and other rational creatures attain to their last end by knowing and loving God.’

¹⁸⁴ ‘For man and other rational creatures attain to their last end by knowing and loving God,’ Aquinas, ST, I-II, q. 1, art. 8, ans.; ‘Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is,’ 1 John 3:2.

I maintain that Taylor's philosophical longing for fullness or transcendence could be understood as a theological longing for God. Taylor argues that the experience of fullness moves a person toward the experience of something or someone beyond the self, something transcendent. In the experience of fullness, a person desires and aspires to something higher and more profound. A fully realized life allows human beings to participate in something of the eternal. Therefore, Taylor's concept of human longing for fullness could be identified as an inner drive, a Thomist interior yearning for God that all human beings possess, even if they do not recognize it or cannot articulate it.

This interior longing for God is both innate and elicited. It is intrinsic, as Ecclesiastes 3:11 shows, 'He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity¹⁸⁵ into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.' The longing is in the human 'heart' as part of the human constitution. The longing can also be elicited, 'For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his divine attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things which have been made.'¹⁸⁶ I maintain that things in creation, and analogously, created things such as works of art, can cause an awareness of God or the things of God. Secular humanity, having rejected the transcendent and thus the eternal, fails to recognize what it seeks. A person may be on a quest, yet may not know what they seek nor how to obtain it. The desire for God, which lay within, needs to be awakened. It can be thus awakened, according to Romans 1:19-20, by the things which God has made. Analogously, this dissertation will argue, that the desire can be thus awakened by what human beings make, works of art, as human art is likened to God's grandchild.

¹⁸⁵ עולם (*olam*): forever, everlasting, eternity.

¹⁸⁶ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2007).

Taylor does not explain why human beings have this longing for transcendence. This chapter proposes that all people have what Aquinas called ‘a natural desire’ (*desiderium naturale*) to see God. It is worth noting that Aquinas’ theory has posed one of the most contentious theological debates in modern Roman Catholicism.¹⁸⁷ Henri de Lubac and Karl Rahner were the outstanding voices in the discourse. While de Lubac and Rahner are similar in their respective approaches to the problem of how the human ‘natural desire’ to see God can be fulfilled - de Lubac posits the *supernatural finality*, while Rahner offers the *supernatural existential* - this study will follow Rahner’s line of thought.¹⁸⁸

The important question for this study is: What is the supernatural existential, and how does it explain the human capacity for an experience of God through art?

Rahner attempts to answer the question of the relationship between human nature and grace.¹⁸⁹ The question arises from the suggestion of Thomas Aquinas that all intelligent creatures (human beings) possess a ‘natural desire to see God,’¹⁹⁰ i.e., the *telos* of humanity is to see, know, love and experience God in his very essence.¹⁹¹ The difficulty Aquinas’ thought creates is how to reconcile Aquinas’ two emphases. On the one hand, Aquinas asserts that man’s final end to which he is ordained is the vision of God in the fullness of his divine

¹⁸⁷ See: Alexander S. Rosenthal, “The Problem of the *Desiderium Naturale* In the Thomist Tradition,” *Verbum* VI/2, 2004, pgs., 335-344]. Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1965); Nicholas J. Healy, “Henri de Lubac on Nature and Grace: A Note On Some Recent Contributions to the Debate,” *Communio* 35 (Winter 2008), pgs., 535-564; Kevin O’Reilly, “By Nature and Grace: The Life of Mind in Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*,” *Angelicum* 91 (2014), pgs., 607-636; Brian Mullady, O.P., *Man’s Desire For God* (Bloomington: 1st Books, 2003); Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire To See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas And His Interpreters*, 2nd edition, (Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2010).

¹⁸⁸ Daniel P. Horan, ‘A Rahnerian Theological Response to Charles Taylor’s “A Secular Age,”’ *New Blackfriars*, January 2014, vol. 95, no. 1055, pgs., 21-42.

¹⁸⁹ Karl Rahner, “Nature and Grace,” in *Theological Investigations* 4, pgs. 166-167, and “The Relationship Between Nature and Grace,” in *Theological Investigations* 1, pg. 314, fn. 14. The debate was called the *Nouvelle théologie* debate and it centered around the natural versus the supernatural possibility and ability to see God, and what Aquinas possibly meant by ‘natural desire.’

¹⁹⁰ *Summa Contra Gentiles* 25 (London: Aeterna Press, 2014).

¹⁹¹ The primary Thomist texts in which he makes this argument are: *Summa Contra Gentiles* (SCG) III, chapters 25-58 (esp. 25, 50-51, 57); *Comp. Theo.*, I, chapter 104; *Summa Theologica* (ST) I, q. 12, art. 1, ST I-II, q. 3, art. 8; *De Virtutibus*, q. un, art. 10; *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 13:12; *Commentary on Matthew* 5:8; *Commentary on The Gospel of John* 1:18.

essence, or the Beatific vision. The desire for this final vision of God is an interior desire within all human beings. Humanity is also, by creation of his unique nature as *imago Dei*, designed for the attainment of the vision, and thus, fulfillment of the desire. However, the attainment of the vision - God in the fullness of his essence - is beyond the natural power of man's nature. Alexander Rosenthal describes the conundrum: Aquinas must demonstrate that the desire to see the Divine essence, to which humanity is ordained, 'corresponds to an immanent human desire.' The main task is to show that this desire to see God must be contained somewhere within human nature. Yet, on the other hand, the fulfilment of the desire and the vision, i.e., the very essence of God (1 John 3:2) is beyond the natural human powers to attain.¹⁹² So the question arises as to how humanity obtains something wholly and entirely beyond its nature. Certainly, grace is required, but what is the relationship between human nature and grace?

Karl Rahner's answer is the *supernatural existential*. The supernatural existential is not part of human nature *per se*; instead it is a necessary and constitutive part of human ontology. The supernatural existential exists as part of man's being. Thus, it is existential. It is a gratuitous, unexacted grace that elevates, enables and makes a human being capable of reaching his telos: communion with God in glory. Therefore, it is supernatural.

Rahner explains the supernatural existential as follows.¹⁹³ God himself is love and desires to communicate himself to an other. So God creates beings whom he can love: humanity. These beings are made in such a way so as to receive God's love in such a way that they accept it for what it is: a gratuitous, unexacted gift.

According to Rahner, humanity must be able to receive God's love, which is none other than God himself. If this is to be so, humanity must have a 'natural' affinity for this

¹⁹² Alexander S. Rosenthal, "The Problem of the *Desiderium Naturale* In the Thomist Tradition," *Verbum* VI/2, 2004, pgs., 336.

¹⁹³ Rahner, "Concerning," pg. 310.

end; he must be made suitable. He must possess room, scope, understanding, and desire for this end. Man should exist with a legitimate potential and capacity for God, and he must have it always. In other words, even a person who has ‘turned away from this Love [God]’ must have the genuine *capacity* to experience this Love. This person must always ‘remain what he was created as’, i.e., a person with whom God can share His love. This potential, this capability, is what is most true to him or her as a person. It is ‘what is inmost and most authentic’ about a person; it is the ‘centre and root of what he is absolutely.’¹⁹⁴ According to Rahner, this is what Augustine meant when he said that God is ‘more interior to me than my most inward part.’ All human beings possess this ‘burning longing for God,’ whether they be regenerate or not, and they must possess this for the entire span of their life. A person may ‘turn away’ from Love, but they must be able to experience it truly; this is the very ground of being. ‘The capacity for the God of self-bestowing personal Love is the central and abiding existential of man as he really is.’¹⁹⁵

An important piece that should be stressed at this point is that while man’s *telos* is ultimately the supernatural Beatific Vision, the supernatural existential also draws human beings into a relationship of love with the transcendent God here and now. Therefore, I maintain that Rahner takes Taylor’s philosophical thoughts a step further, and into the theological arena. Taylor’s philosophical longing for fullness, via humanity’s *ineradicable bent* - i.e., the depths of the human person that desires experiences of fullness (Taylor, 2007, pg. 638) - is transposed into a theological longing for God. Taylor claims that all persons seek fullness, or transcendence *here and now*. Rahner affirms that claim and then redirects it toward the transcendent God.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 311.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 312.

This view of the supernatural existential argues against both Pelagianism and nominalism. Grace is necessary, thus denying Pelagianism. The supernatural end of man is constitutive of man's ontology, not simply willed by God for man in 'pure [earthly] nature,' thus denying nominalism.¹⁹⁶

Therefore, I maintain that Rahner's theory of the *supernatural existential* provides a theological path to go beyond Taylor's fullness thesis. According to Taylor, human beings have a deep longing for transcendence or the transcendent. Although God does not owe anyone a relationship with himself, he has constituted human beings such that the longing for a relationship can be fulfilled. There exists within human ontology the natural desire to know God here and now, within the immanent frame. It is likely that if Rahner were conversant with Taylor, he would suggest that when a person experiences moments of fullness, as Taylor puts it, that person is feeling the influence of the supernatural existential.

6 Conclusion: *Imago Dei* Makes The Experience of Fullness and Transcendence Possible

Neo-Thomist anthropology is the theological core of this study. It offers a framework for why human beings can experience fullness. Humanity is created *imago Dei*. Two aspects of humanity as *imago Dei* specifically addressed Taylor's notion of the experience of fullness. First, every person desires happiness. Second, human beings are passionate beings. Both of these Thomist concepts anticipate Taylor's notion of fullness. Taylor proposes that all people desire fullness and transcendence, and fullness is a pleasurable experience that involves a person's emotions, loves, and inclinations, i.e., the passions. Roman Catholic theology built upon Aquinas' concepts to propose that all human beings, regenerate or unregenerate possess creative ability as *imago Dei*. This creative ability enables artists to

¹⁹⁶ Rahner writes in a footnote on page 312, 'But the decisive argument for the existence of the supernatural existential is... even prior to grace, man's binding, indissoluble ordination to the supernatural end is the determination of man himself, and not merely a divine intention, a decree "in God's will." To make of this a purely "juridicial," purely "moral" entity is nothing but nominalism, which has not taken cognizance of itself.'

contribute to the flourishing of culture by revealing beauty and the mysteries of the world. Therefore, I maintain that Aquinas' concept of humanity as *imago Dei* provides the theological framework for the notion of fullness. These themes suggest why a human being can experience fullness.

More importantly, Neo-Thomist anthropology allows this study to take a step further than Taylor's notion of fullness. Human beings can experience genuine encounters with God through aesthetic experiences of works of art because they are *imago Dei*. Aquinas calls human beings the *horizon between heaven and earth* or the bridge between the spiritual and the material. Aquinas also proposes that all people have a *natural desire* for God. It is this desire, perhaps hidden deeply in a person's interior space, that must be awakened. Therefore, I maintain that aesthetic experiences of art can awaken this desire.

The following chapters will explore the question *how* human beings can have experiences of fullness through aesthetic experiences of art. How works of art are created and their effect on viewers will be explored. Philosopher Jacques Maritain's theory of art will be the primary source.

Jacques Maritain and The Creation of Works of Art: On the Path to Fullness

The objective of this chapter is to introduce a philosophy of art that will provide a proposed aesthetic framework for answering the research question. It will focus on the theory promulgated by twentieth-century philosopher Jacques Maritain. Maritain is a suitable dialogue partner for several reasons. First, Maritain, like Taylor are Roman Catholics who generally operate from a Neo-Thomist framework. Second, because both authors speak to the modern secular culture. Third, Maritain can speak to the current situation of modern art due to his unique perspective on art and the creation of works of art. Maritain is a Neo-Thomist who draws on Aquinas' anthropological thought to formulate his theory of art. Maritain will employ Aquinas' concept that art is a virtue of the Practical Intellect. Maritain draws on Aquinas to posit that the experience of art, from the initial inception of an artistic idea within an artist, to the experience of art for the viewer, takes place in the depths of the human interior faculties - which Maritain calls the soul - and lived experience. It will also be demonstrated that Maritain's thoughts regarding these experiences are consistent with Taylor's descriptions of the experience of fullness. The conclusion proposed is that Maritain offers an *aesthetic* response to the question of the experience of fullness. Therefore, Maritain is key to the thesis that art and the aesthetic experience of art can function as a medium for the experience of fullness.

1 The Story: Maritain Prepares the Way for Taylor

Why Jacques Maritain? Maritain prepares the way for Taylor in several ways. First, Maritain is a fellow Roman Catholic to Taylor. Both operate generally from a Thomist perspective. Taylor's discussion of the Good Life (Chapter One, Section 1.5) is within an

Aristotelian/Thomist framework. Meanwhile, Maritain, a Neo-Thomist, holds that art is a *habitus* and *virtue* of the practical intellect; art is the interior capability of *making*. He writes,¹⁹⁷

Before embarking on a discussion of the realm of Art, I should like to remark that in speaking of Art, we are speaking of Art in the artist, in the soul and creative dynamism, or as a particular energy, or vital power, which we have to consider in itself or to disengage in its nature, but which exists with the man and which man uses to achieve a good work.

Maritain is here leaning explicitly on Thomist anthropology. Therefore, it is appropriate for an aesthetic response to Taylor to originate within that same framework. Maritain is important because his theory of art as an interior reality provides a way to understand works of art and the effect they can have on a viewer of art, which aligns with Taylor's concept of fullness.

Second, both Taylor and Maritain address the contemporary secular context with similar concepts. In *The Person and the Common Good*,¹⁹⁸ Maritain explores contemporary political and philosophical questions as they were in 1947: fascism, racism, national socialism, communism, and materialism.¹⁹⁹ Fred Dallmayr notes that although many of these targets have disappeared from modern history, others have not.²⁰⁰ Therefore, Dallmayr notes, 'Maritain's comments are powerful and right on target.' Dallmayr describes Maritain as a "humanist"... and a religious believer open or reacting to the crises of modernity, especially political crises.' (Dallmayr, 2023, pg. 3). To do this, Maritain employs the term dualism, by which he is referring to the separation of the transcendent and the immanent, which is the language of Taylor. He writes,²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Jacques Maritain, *The Responsibility of the Artist*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), pg. 2.

¹⁹⁸ Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966). The first edition was published in New York by Scribner, 1947.

¹⁹⁹ Fred Dallmayr, 'Continuity and Change: Remembering Jacques Maritain,' University of Notre Dame *Review of Politics*, pg. 3; https://reviewofpolitics.nd.edu/assets/330149/continuity_and_change_dallmayr.pdf; accessed 12 September, 2023.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. He notes that fascism becomes 'aggressive chauvinism,' 'racism coupled with elitism and social oppression,' and 'the worship of materialism.'

²⁰¹ Jacques Maritain, 'The Integral Humanism and the Crisis of Modern Times,' *The Review of Politics* vol. 1, no. 1, January 1939, pgs. 15-16; cited in Dallmayr, pg. 2.

One of the worst vices of the modern world is the dualism, the dissociation between the things of God and the things of the world. The latter, the things of the social, economic and political life, have been abandoned to their own carnal law, removed from the exigencies of the gospel. The result is that they have become more and more unlivable...Such a disorder can be remedied only by a renewal of the profoundest energies of the religious conscience arising into the temporal existence.

The Introduction to *Art and Scholasticism* provides the background for why Maritain wrote the book, which is the failure of modern industrialism. Maritain refers to the pushback against industrialization and the ugliness of the modern world which was characteristic of Romantic thought. Taylor's argument that our contemporary situation is Post-Romantic or Neo-Romantic is crucial to his secular age thesis. Maritain also alludes to the loss of transcendence in our current situation, 'by our fall from the pinnacle' and our pursuit of life by 'bread alone,' and the never-ending exultation of the immanent frame found in 'all the kingdoms of the world.'²⁰² Maritain does not use Taylor's specific language, but he shares Taylor's critique of modern secular culture. I maintain that given the similarity of language and concepts, Maritain is a prelude to Taylor.

Third, the importance of *Art and Scholasticism*, according to Maritain, is that it provides an aesthetic response to the modern situation - with its disintegration of moral foundations and lack of meaning - which is 'based four-square upon the Rock of a philosophy wholly philosophic, wholly Christian, and therefore wholly Catholic' (Maritain, 2017, pg. iii). This dissertation maintains that an *aesthetic* response is required to address Taylor's philosophical notion of fullness therefore Maritain is a competent dialogue partner.

Maritain also made peace with modern art by accepting several new realities of art: 1) the Romantic inward turn, in which modern art became a celebration of subjectivity and personal expression 2) aesthetics necessarily involves personal experience; modern art is, first

²⁰² Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism and Other Essays* (Andesite Press, 2017), pg. i: 'Faced with the appalling results of industrialism, with misery and ugliness upon every side, we are still trying to live by bread alone; we are still refusing to see that we are hurt by our fall from that pinnacle of the Temple of God upon which, with however precarious balance, we stood; we are still covetously surveying all the kingdoms of the world.'

and foremost, an ‘encounter of persons’²⁰³ and 3) the aesthetic has become an ethical category; the space in which we talk about the good.²⁰⁴ Maritain thus offers a solution to Taylor’s philosophical notion of fullness through the medium of art. Maritain addresses moral issues, as does Taylor. However Maritain offers his solution in aesthetic terms.²⁰⁵

This dissertation by no means intends to claim a definitive interpretation of Maritain’s thoughts. It will attempt to work from Maritain’s texts in an attempt to fill out the philosophic framework that Taylor sketches.

2 What is Art? Maritain and The Interiority of *Art*

2.1 *Art As A Virtue Of The Practical Intellect*

Maritain locates art as interior reality; it is a virtue of the Practical Intellect. This is a significant shift away from twentieth-century attempts to define art in which the definition focused on the *objects* that were to be considered art. The modern formulas looked for an essential definition based on necessary and sufficient qualities in an object in order to define it as a work of art: ‘*X* is a work of art *if and only if*...’²⁰⁶ The previous philosophies focused

²⁰³ William Dyrness, ‘Subjectivity, The Person, And Modern Art: Theological Reflections on Jacques Maritain and Charles Taylor,’ *CrossCurrents*, March 2013, vol. 63, no. 1, [92-105] pg. 92.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., pgs., 92, and 98.

²⁰⁵ Maritain, *The Responsibility of the Artist* (New York: Scribner, 1960); an excerpt from the Foreword: ‘Though the requirements of the subject matter have made it necessary to bring up a number of themes already discussed in *Art and Scholasticism* and in *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, my topic does not pertain to aesthetics alone; it pertains also, and mainly, to moral philosophy.’

²⁰⁶ See Appendix of this dissertation. Also, Noel Carroll, *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999). Other Major works that attempt to define art which include the discussion of definitive formulae for works of art include: Thomas Adajian, “The Definition of Art” in EN Zalta ed. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018; Clive Bell, *Art* 4th ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1920); Noël Carroll, 1997 ‘Danto’s New Definition of Art and the Problem of Art Theories’ *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 1997, 37/4:386–392.; R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958); Arthur Danto, “The Artworld” *Journal of Philosophy* 61/19, 1964, pgs., 571–584; Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981); Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective* 1st ed. (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1992); Danto, *After The End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997); Danto, *The Philosophical disEnfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Danto, *What Is Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); George Dickie “Defining Art” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 6/3, 1969, pgs. 253–256; William E. Kennick “Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?” *Mind*, vol. 67, no. 267, 1958, pgs. 317–34; Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy In A New Key* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953); Jerrold Levinson “Defining Art Historically” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 19/3, 1979, pgs. 232–250; Leo

on attempts to define the object on the wall or in the gallery. As a result, the ‘story of philosopher’s attempts to define the concept of art has not been a happy one.’²⁰⁷ Art, therefore, was the thing *out there*, the object on the wall or in the gallery. It was the external visual object. Alternatively, art was the external process whereby an artefact was created (i.e., a person could enrol in an ‘art class’). Maritain upends that entire paradigm by locating art within the human artist. The analytical philosophers of art welcomed Maritain’s theory in that it ‘goes beyond the debates between representative, expressive, formative, institutional and historical-reflexive theories.’²⁰⁸ In other words, the Maritain expression - art is a virtue of the Practical Intellect - is the preferred pathway into understanding works of art and the effect they have upon a viewer. I maintain that Maritain shows the pathway, not necessarily the destination, for understanding art. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the important distinction between art and works of art. This distinction will be used throughout this study. Maritain’s theory allows us to better understand how exterior works of art can be mediums of the interior experience of fullness by locating the origins of such works within the inner life of the artist. This faculty of the inner dynamism of creativity Maritain, relying on Aquinas, calls the *soul*.

Maritain will argue that art is an internal disposition, a habit and virtue that resides within the artist. It is the ability and capability to create from within the human interiority or soul. Likewise, poetry is not simply the verses on a page but rather the creative process and the animating principle whereby the artist communicates the connection between their inner

Tolstoy *What is art?* (London; New York: Penguin Books, 1995); Morris Weitz “The Role of Theory in Aesthetics,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15/1, 1956, pgs. 27–35; Ludwig Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* New York: Macmillan, 1953).

²⁰⁷ Berys Gaut, “Art as a Cluster Concept,” in *Theories of Art Today*, ed. N. Carroll, (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pg. 25.

²⁰⁸ Anthony Richard Hayes, “Jacques Maritain’s Ethics of Art,” *New Blackfriars* vol. 99, no. 1079, January 2018 [66-83], pg. 83.

being as a human self and the inner being of things in the world. A work of art, therefore, is the *product* of this human intercommunication.²⁰⁹ Maritain explains,²¹⁰

Before embarking on a discussion of the realm of Art, I should like to remark that in speaking of Art, we are speaking of Art in the artist, in the soul and creative dynamism of the artist, or as a particular energy, or vital power, which we have to consider in itself or to disengage in its nature, but which exists within man and which man uses to achieve good work. He uses not only his hands, but that inner, specific principle of activity which develops in his own soul. According to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, Art is a virtue of the Practical Intellect, that particular virtue of the Practical Intellect which deals with the creation of objects to be made.

Brett Potter also sees the importance of the human aspect of art and works of art. Art and works of art operate ‘from the ground up.’²¹¹ In this way, works of art bring together the subjectivity of the artist with the viewer of art; art is an encounter of persons. Maritain will explain that what the artist knows intuitively and cogitatively is things of the world and the objective, transcendent realities of the living cosmos. This knowledge is then communicated through the work. Maritain’s Neo-Thomism is once again apparent here: humanity as *imago Dei* is the horizon between the spiritual and material realms. The *hylomorphic* nature of human beings provides the capability for people to experience the reality of both realms and to manifest those realities in the world through acts of creativity. Since humanity is the horizon and boundary between heaven and earth, then art and works of art are the threshold. Works of art are said to be ‘God’s grandchild.’

Why is this important? I maintain that this is important because if art is to function as a medium for the experience of fullness, then the more interior art is located, the more

²⁰⁹ Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (Providence: Cluny, 2021), pg. 1.

²¹⁰ Jacques Maritain, *The Responsibility of the Artist* (New York: Scribner, 1960), pg. 22-23.

²¹¹ Brett David Potter, “Creative Intuition After Beauty: Jacques Maritain’s Philosophy of Art in the Contemporary Context,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, vol. 21, no. 2 Spring 2018, pg. 83. Potter provides an excellent summary: ‘Poetry, understood as the animating principle of art, serves in his [Maritain’s] thought as an interpretive key to better understanding the nature of art and artmaking from the starting point of the uniquely intuitive abilities of the artist. This ground-up methodology works itself up from the artistic *praxis* toward beauty (as the implied correlative of the ontologically free activity of poetry), rather than impressing transcendental Beauty on all art as an ultimate rubric and ontological ground...The work of art is thus produced at the point of confluence of subjectivity and objectivity; it is a way of seeing that passes through the door of the interiority of the Self in order to penetrate to the mysterious, even transcendent interiority of Things, while simultaneously awakening to its own selfhood in its aesthetic experience of the created order’ (86). Potter is helpful when he suggests that Maritain’s contribution is important for the contemporary discussion of art, regardless whether or not one holds to the existence of transcendentals (83).

compelling its effect can be on the person and the greater the experience of fullness. If art is an external reality only - i.e., the thing on the wall - then how can we account for the internal, affective response to it?

Remember that Taylor's concept of fullness is a poignant, interior experience brought about through some activity or condition. Fullness can 'provide a glimpse into what life could or should be.'²¹² Fullness is aspirational and inspiring; it is a reflection of transcendence. Transcendence is the meaning of fullness.²¹³ It is 'moments when the deep divisions, distractions, worries, sadnesses that seem to drag us down are somehow dissolved, or brought into alignment, so that we feel united, moving forward, suddenly capable and full of energy.'²¹⁴ These are all interior reactions. I maintain that art can be such an activity or condition.

Maritain employs Aquinas' concepts of the Practical Intellect over against the Speculative Intellect.²¹⁵ The Practical Intellect is knowledge for the purpose of making; it is the appetite - i.e., the energy directed toward the desires, loves, wants, inclination and will - which is directed toward the work to be done. The Speculative Intellect is for the purpose of knowing; it is the appetite - the energy directed toward the desires, loves, wants, inclination and will - which is directed toward some existential good, with Being (what things are), and with truth. Art resides in the soul as a certain perfection of the soul. It is a *habitus*²¹⁶ and a *virtue*.²¹⁷

²¹² *A Secular Age*, pg. 5.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, pg. 769.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 6

²¹⁵ Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* chapter 2, pg. 40; *Art and Scholasticism with Other Essays*, chapter 2.

²¹⁶ Maritain defines *habitus*: state of being, condition; an inner quality or stable and deep-rooted disposition that the human subject and his natural powers to a higher degree of vital formation and energy- or that makes him possessed of a particular strength of his own: when a *habitus*, a state of possession or master quality, an inner demon if you prefer - has developed in us, it becomes our treasured good, our most unbending strength, because it is an ennoblement in the very kingdom of human nature and human dignity (43).

²¹⁷ Maritain defines *virtue*: A *habitus* or 'state of possession', an inner strength developed in a person, which perfects him with regard to a specific way of acting - to the extent to which he employs the virtue - undeviating in a given activity (43).

Virtues... are stable dispositions or inner forces developed in the soul, which perfect its operative powers in a certain line of direction.²¹⁸

Art, therefore, is concerned with the creation of objects to be made.²¹⁹

A crucial implication of Maritain's thought is that any artist who cultivates artistic *habitus*, regardless of religious affiliation or lack thereof, can reveal 'the interior reflection of the radiance of grace.' As Potter explains, any artist who 'develops the *habitus* of contemplative, creative intuition may thus become a saint.' By this, he means that any artist can bring out what is 'authentically universal' about life because 'every spiritual radiance is a promise and a symbol of the divine harmonies of the gospel.'²²⁰ Therefore, I maintain that any artist, believer or not, regenerate or unregenerate, who taps into the interior virtue of art is capable of communicating something of the reality of life in the world, be it spiritual or physical. Maritain is thus able to see the value of modern art as a vehicle for the communication of higher truths, which are usually associated with the Speculative Intellect. Here again, the *hylomorphic* nature of humanity is relevant. This communicative ability was demonstrated earlier in the work of Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin.

Maritain stresses the employment of the Practical Intellect because the artist will share this knowledge and their own subjectivity *creatively*, not discursively; *aesthetically*, not speculatively. The artist knows and operates through their body: from the inner depths, or soul, through their hands. What the artist communicates perhaps can be discursively explained, but first and foremost, and this is the point, it is *felt* and known at deeper than

²¹⁸ "Art and Morality," in *The Responsibility of the Artist*, 4; see also *Art and Scholasticism With Other Essays*, chapter four. Maritain here follows Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 55, art. 3): 'On the contrary, Augustine says (*De Moribus Eccl.* Vi.) No one can doubt that virtue makes the soul exceeding good; and the Philosopher says (*Ehtic.* ii 6) 'virtue is that which makes its possessor good, and his work good likewise... I answer that... Therefore, human virtue which is an operative habit, is a good habit, productive of good works.'

²¹⁹ The habits and the virtues are not to be confused with the seven 'intelligences' in Howard Gardner's work. Gardner's proposition of seven intelligences proposes human ability from a psychological, educational and social scientific perspective. Maritain is working only in an Aristotelian/Thomist philosophical and theological framework. See: Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983, 2004, 2011).

²²⁰ Brett David Potter, "Creative Intuition After Beauty: Jacques Maritain's Philosophy of Art in the Contemporary Context," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, vol. 21, no. 2, Spring 2018 [81-108], pg. 88.

cognitive levels. Similarly, this is where Taylor's concept of fullness operates. A person experiencing fullness *feels* the goodness of life; in those moments of fullness, a person knows intuitively that life that can be 'fuller, richer, deeper, and more worth while,' than usual.²²¹

This is significant for this dissertation's consideration of Taylor's notion of the pursuit of fullness. An artist need not be a Christian to employ art as a means of reaching higher planes of experience or fullness. The modern, secular, contemporary artist, as *imago Dei*, can experience fullness and can thus be a conduit of fullness; they can be inspired, feel a sense of unity within themselves and full of energy, and obtain a glimpse into what life could or should be. The human artist can communicate something about their experience of the spiritual things of the world, which can be understood, received and participated in by the viewer. This is why Maritain was able to make peace with modern art. The modern secular quest for fullness can be pursued by any artist and can be a *theological* space. Likewise, as *imago Dei*, the horizon between heaven and earth, the modern secular viewer of works of art can receive something of the spiritual realities conveyed through the work.²²²

2.2 *The Preconscious Life Of The Intellect*

What is Maritain's theory of art? It begins when he posits what he terms the Spiritual Unconscious or Preconscious. *Poetry* is the creative process whereby the artist communicates the connection between their inner being as a human self and the inner being of things in the world work together with the intellect. Previously, the external platonic muse was considered the source of inspiration for poetry, songs, and literature. In contrast, according to Maritain, the muse is actually the internal *creative intuition*. This is an important point in his theory of

²²¹ *A Secular Age*, pg. 5.

²²² Note: The question of how divine grace may work in relation to human nature and human beings knowing God, or the things of God was discussed in chapter four of this dissertation. Divine grace is certainly necessary, however, the point relevant to this study is that human beings, as *imago Dei* must exist with a legitimate potential and capacity for God, and as Rahner noted, 'he must have it always.'

art: there exists in human beings ‘a spiritual - not animal - unconscious activity’ (Maritain, 2021, pg. 83). It is principally unconscious, which then merges into the conscious (Maritain, 2021, pg. 84),

Poetic intuition, for instance, is born in the unconscious, but emerges from it; the poet [artist] is not unaware of this intuition, on the contrary it is his most precious light and primary rule of his virtue of art...he is aware of it... on the edge of the unconscious.

‘Everything depends’ on the concept of the existence of a spiritual unconscious, or preconscious (Maritain, 2021, pg. 84). The spiritual preconscious is not the Freudian unconscious; it is not automatic and deaf. The two are thoroughly different in nature. The spiritual preconscious is part of human beings as *imago Dei*. It is neither a non-conscious nor a beyond-conscious mystical, trance-like experience that does not involve the intellect. It is not the case that the creative intuition acts in some supra-sensible manner that causes the suspension of the intellect. It is the part of the interior human faculties that strive to know the inner or spiritual realities of things in the world, and is capable of doing so. From this intuitive knowledge will emerge the germ or seed that will eventually manifest itself in the work of art (Maritain, 2021, pgs. 85-87).

2.3 *The Illuminating Intellect And The Preconscious Activity Of The Spirit*

The artist takes in knowledge through experience and the senses. However, this knowledge is passive, unfiltered, unprocessed and has not yet formed into concepts. It is this knowledge that is the germ of the idea for the work. How is it that this spiritual, emotional, or abstract content comes to the fore of the intellect in order to be formulated into concepts, which will be integrated into the work? The *Illuminating Intellect* brings that knowledge forward into abstract concepts which are then embraced by the intellect. Now the artist has

something from which to create the work. This stage could be variously called ‘inspiration’ or ‘illumination.’²²³

Maritain describes the Illuminating Intellect (Maritain, 2021, pg. 89): it,

[P]ermeates the images with its pure and purely activating spiritual light and actuates or awakens the potential intelligibility which is contained in them (*Intuition*, 88)... [A]n inner spiritual light which is a participation in the uncreated divine light, but which enlightens every man, through its pure spirituality ceaselessly in act, the primal quickening source of all intellectual activity.

The Illuminating Intellect is active; it is a ‘light’ which enlightens every man.

Maritain is here applying the Thomist concept of an illuminating power from God, which is present and active in human beings and given for the purpose of understanding higher, or spiritual, truths.²²⁴ As light is required for sight, the Illuminating Intellect is necessary for understanding. The Illuminating Intellect is active, yet by itself does not actually understand, even as the light does not see colour. It performs the function of light, i.e., it allows concepts and ideas to become clear and understood. It is like the light, which is necessary in order for the agent to see colour.²²⁵ If we consider that things that can be known from the senses do not exist apart from matter and material things, then the Illuminating Intellect is necessary. The passive intellect simply takes in sense perceptions; it does not cognize them, while the active intellect allows ideas to be formulated.²²⁶

Music producer Rick Rubin, who is not a Christian believer, describes the experience.

What Maritain calls the Illuminating Intellect, Rubin calls *The Source*. The Source of creativity begins with ‘everything.’ ‘Everything that rests unspoken and unthought is within

²²³ Carl R. Hausman, “Maritain’s Interpretation of Creativity in Art,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Criticism*, winter, 1960, vol. 19, no. 2, fn. 3, pg. 219.

²²⁴ According to Aquinas, the human soul derives its intellect from God himself, in two ways: 1) on the universal level, (John 1:9) 2) within individual human beings, (Psalm 4:6). God provides an enlightening power to help humanity understand themselves and the things of the world. This is an important feature of Maritain’s Thomism, as this power allows the artist to ‘take in’ the world around her, in order to draw out from her own subjectivity that which she will attempt to communicate through her work. Importantly, for Aquinas and Maritain, this light is not restricted to regenerate believers.

²²⁵ *ST I*, q. 79, art 3, ans: ‘We must therefore assign on the part of the intellect some power to make things actually intelligible, by abstraction of the species from material conditions. And such is the necessity of an active intellect.’

²²⁶ *ST I*, q. 79, art 3, rep. obj. 3: ‘And therefore in order to understand them [the nature of sensible things], the immaterial nature of the passive intellect would not suffice but for the presence of the active intellect, which makes things actually intelligible by way of abstraction.’

us.’²²⁷ The artist has a thought which originates in the ‘presence of the object of your awareness’ - the thing itself. The artist then becomes ‘aware that you’re aware’ of the concept or idea (Rubin, 2023, pg. 20). The Source then sheds light on the concept so that the artist can proceed in the process of creation. Maritain would likely suggest that the Source is actually the illuminating light within the human soul which originates in God.

How does this further develop Taylor’s notion of fullness? The notion of fullness, as has been demonstrated, depends on an interior operative principle within human beings, a ‘powerful intuition of what fullness would be’ if a person were to be in that condition. It is also a ‘place of power’ which is ‘deeply moving’ and by which a person is inspired.²²⁸ Fullness is a reflection of transcendent reality.²²⁹ The experience of fullness can orientate us - i.e., give a person new perspective or point them in a new direction of life - because it alerts a person to its origin: ‘the presence of God, or the voice of nature, or the force which flows through everything.’²³⁰ Both Maritain, a Christian believer, and Rubin, an unbeliever, recognize such a principle. Maritain is drawing from his Neo-Thomist roots in ascribing this process of illumination to an inner spiritual light that provides the human soul and intellect the ability to know and understand not just spiritual truths but Truth Itself.²³¹ Thus, Maritain

²²⁷ Rick Rubin, *The Creative Act: A Way of Being* (New York: Penguin Press, 2023), pg. 13. At times Rubin takes the opposite position as Maritain. In one instance, creativity is about ‘tuning in’ to, or receiving from the universe, which is the deist ‘clock.’ The universe in an inanimate object that sends out signals to which the artist must be attuned. The Source is something outside of the artist’s self, a transcendent reality. The ‘material’ with which the artist works is in the things she experiences, but then works its way to her interior self. What is of importance in Rubin’s philosophy of creativity is where he does agree with Maritain. See Rubin, ‘Tuning In,’ pages 5-13.

²²⁸ *A Secular Age*, pg., 5.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, pg., 769.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, pg., 6.

²³¹ According to Aquinas, this ‘light’ makes the intellect capable of understanding spiritual realities and truths, and is God Himself. See Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 79, art. 4, ans: ‘But the separate intellect, according to the teaching of our faith, is God Himself, Who is the soul’s Creator, and only beatitude; as will be shown later on (Question [90], Article [3]; FS, Question [3], Article [7]). Wherefore the human soul derives its intellectual light from Him, according to Ps. 4:7, “The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us.”’ See also *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Lecture 3, paragraphs 95-98: ‘Other things both live and know, but their knowledge, since it is on the sense level, is concerned only with individual and material things, as is the case with the brutes. So they have both life and a certain light. But they do not have the light of men, who live, and know, not only truths, but also the very nature of truth itself. Such are rational creatures, to whom not only this or that are made manifest, but truth itself, which can be manifested and is manifestive to all’ (97).

places the very beginning of the creative process in the realm of the transcendent. A person can encounter transcendence in the experience of fullness through the medium of works of art because the interior reality of illumination has been placed there by God. This interior principle is acknowledged by artists, Christian and non-Christian, as operative *through the aesthetic experience of art*.

2.4 How And What Does The Artist Know?

Maritain begins with the concept of the *poetic intuition*, or *creative intuition*. He starts with an 'intuition,' i.e., the faculty of knowing that does not resort to reasoning or proof, a natural ability or knowledge of something without reasoning or evidence. It is the faculty of direct perception and immediate apprehension. It is the knowledge which brings together things, or objects, and the self in or through an affective experience, i.e., through the emotions, affections or inclinations. This intuitive knowledge becomes part of the artist's subjectivity, i.e., what they know of the self, as well as things in the world. The important point for Maritain is that this knowledge manifests in the creation of a work of art. It is *creative intuition*. This kind of knowledge always culminates in a work.

So what kind of knowledge is involved with poetic activity? First, Maritain identifies the *creativity of the spirit*. This is creativity that is free from the utilitarian purposes of the craftsman. It resides in the 'spirit' or depths of the artist. Anthony Hayes agrees with Maritain when he suggests that artists must be inspired to communicate what they know and have experienced of the world, the things of the world, or even God. They must operate from *freedom*, concerned only with sharing their beliefs, loves and inclinations. They cannot intend

for the work to earn for them a livelihood, for political advocacy, or for any utilitarian purpose.²³²

Haynes offers a critique of what he perceives to be Maritain's overly narrow position here. He notes that the mural art of the 'street artist' Banksy, as well the poetry of Naomi Shihab Nye, the performances of Dada, and Futurism, can be 'uncompromisingly political' in nature. The political beliefs of these artists are part of their own subjectivity, which is defined as what they know and have experienced of the world, the things of the world and even God. Perhaps Maritain and Haynes can be reconciled if it is agreed that art for political propaganda, or for any 'people-pleasing' purpose, is not the true purpose of art. Haynes affirms that Maritain is alerting the reader to the 'allure' of prestige and payment that can come from creating works of art (Hayes, 2018, pg. 71). However, if a 'political' message originates within the subjectivity of the artist, both Maritain and Haynes would likely approve.

The artist must operate from freedom because the artist works from the dynamic faculty of *Poetry*. Poetry gives birth to *poetic* or *creative* intuition, which provides the germ of the work. Maritain defines *poetry* as 'the process whereby the artist communicates the connection, i.e., experiential understanding between their inner being as a human self, and the inner being of things in the world' (Maritain, 2021, pg. 1). Operating from creative freedom cannot be accomplished if the work were created for utilitarian purposes. Yet, it is so much more than that. It 'is spiritual nourishment.' It cannot satisfy all the desires of the appetites; rather, it makes one hungrier for spiritual realities by drawing the inclinations, longing and loves of the artist toward higher horizons. 'Poetry is the heaven of the working reason.' 'Poetry is a divination of the spiritual in the things of sense - which expresses itself in the

²³² Anthony Richard Hayes, 'Jacques Maritain's Ethics of Art,' *New Blackfriars* vol. 99, no. 1079, January 2018, pg. 71, citing Maritain, *The Responsibility of the Artist* (New York: Scribner, 1960), pg. 85.

things of sense, and in a delight of sense.’ ‘Poetry quickens art.’ ‘Poetry reaches it [the spiritual] in the flesh’ (Maritain, 2021, pg. 217). What does Maritain mean by all this?

Maritain is suggesting that human beings possess a faculty (what he refers to as the soul) that makes them capable of understanding and experiencing spiritual and physical reality in order to bring about these realities in the work. Raïssa Maritain, artist and spouse of Jacques Maritain writes,²³³

Because poetry is a human thing. It is born in man in his deepest self, there where all his faculties originate. When it is exteriorized in an object, in a song, in a poem, it must bear the trace of its origin.

Poets and artists are capable of accessing these realities because,

Poets and other artists, the great inventors and the saints, all draw on the same divine source, but with different dispositions...They are all of them imitators of God.²³⁴

The Maritains appear to be drawing on Thomist *imago Dei* anthropology, in which humanity is the horizon between heaven and earth, although this is not explicitly stated. Whatever the source, the significance of poetry stands. Poetry is the human capability to reach into the heavens and, more importantly, *communicate that knowledge through a work*.

Kevin O'Reilly is critical of Maritain's notion of *poetry*.²³⁵ His interpretation of Maritain is that Maritain is saying that 'artists have special insight into reality that mere mortals lack.' O'Reilly questions how Maritain's *poetry* differs from connatural knowledge that a 'wise person' might enjoy. He concludes that Maritain's explication of *poetry* needs more 'sober reflection': 'artists are not set apart from the rest of mere mortals by virtue of their exalted insight into the nature of reality.' O'Reilly misses Maritain's main point. Artists are not endowed with some supra-normal sense of reality through *poetry*; rather, Maritain is arguing that *poetry* is the dynamic ability by which the artist *communicates* her knowledge *through a work of art*. For Maritain, *poetry* is a 'process of intercommunication between the

²³³ Raïssa Maritain, *Poetry and Mysticism*, (Wiseblood Books, 2022), pg., 6.

²³⁴ Ibid., pg., 18.

²³⁵ Kevin O'Reilly, 'Poetry, Beauty and Contemplation: The Complete Aesthetics of Jacques Maritain. By John G. Trapani Jr: Book Reviews,' *Heythrop Journal*, vol. 52, no. 6 (2011), pgs., 1071-1072.

inner being of things and the inner being of the [artist's] human Self.' Maritain is clear: 'Poetry, in this sense, is the secret life of each and all of the arts; another name for what Plato called *mousike*' (Maritain, 2021, pg. 1). Elsewhere Maritain says that *poetry* extends beyond art, although it is orientated in that direction. *Poetry* and *poetic intuition* are found 'in science, philosophy, big business, revolution, religion, etc...when the mind of man attains to a certain depth or mastery in the power of discovering new horizons and taking great tasks' (Maritain, 2021, pg. 218). Thus, for Maritain, *poetry* is found everywhere, in all 'mere mortals' - *imago Dei* - who attain new depths of knowledge.

To understand the interiority of poetry - the creative process - the artist must look to 'The First Poet' (Maritain, 2021, pg. 102). What about God the Artist does the human artist need to understand? The artist should understand that God's creative Idea is formative: it creates. It manifests beauty because that which is found to be real in the things created is the presence of God Himself (Maritain, 2021, pg. 102),

And that which will be expressed or manifested in the things made is nothing else than their Creator Himself, whose transcendent Essence is enigmatically signified in a diffused, dispersed, or parceled out manner, by works which are deficient likenesses of and created participations in it.

Rubin articulates something similar (Rubin, 2023, pg. 64),

The psyche has admittance to a universal wisdom deeper than what the mind can come up with in our conscious mind. It provides a far less limited view. An oceanic source. We don't know how it works, and we don't know why it works, yet many artists tap into something beyond themselves without recognizing the process at play, purely through accessing the subconscious.

Again, Rubin is not a Christian believer therefore his terminology may seem curious. Yet he witnesses to the veracity of the claims made by Maritain. Rubin's views follow the same trajectory as Maritain's. Both claim that the artist can experience and communicate transcendence through their work. Maritain's view is more poignant than Rubin's in that, for Maritain, what comes through the work, or is manifested by the work, is the presence of God himself. I maintain that this concept may be affirmed because art is a *locus theologicus*, as was discussed in Chapter Three of this study. The 'wager', according to George Steiner, is on

‘transcendence’; human artistic communication is meaningful because of the ‘presumption of the presence’ of God.

Rubin’s comments are interesting because he suggests that artists who are not Christians can encounter ‘something beyond themselves’ in the creative process and not even recognize what it is. This something, according to Rubin, is clearly something immensely greater than ordinary human capability. It is ‘oceanic’ in its nature and scope. Maritain would reply that what (or Who) that artist encountered was none other than the transcendent Creator Himself. Maritain and Rubin describe a principle found in Romans 1: the world of creation as vehicle for a general revelation of God, as St. Paul explains. Here that principle is extrapolated to created things functioning in much the same way, although Maritain makes no mention of Romans 1.

Poetic intuition, as an expression of the *habitus*, tends towards beauty. It develops into a skill that bypasses ‘impediments’ or inabilities of the body, and thus, it is able to extract the higher meaning of things.²³⁶ Unlike the craftsman making a chair, which must be constructed according to specific rules, the artist can create from poetic intuition whatever they desire. Since the only goal is to produce an object or a work that is the fruit of the seed of the artist’s own subjectivity, the *telos* of the work is to reveal beauty. The artist pursues beauty in accordance with her *habitus*. Maritain explains that God is the supreme Poet, and thus, ‘all poetry [the process whereby the artist communicates the connection between their inner being as a human self, and the inner being of things in the world] receives its virtue from Him.’ Therefore, ‘what the artist loves over and above all is beauty in which to engender a work’ (Maritain, 2021, pg. 102). Maritain affirmed this earlier,²³⁷

²³⁶ William Dyrness, ‘Rouault, Maritain and the Catholic Revival in France,’ lecture given at the Institute Catholic de Paris, 15 June, 2022, pg. 12.

²³⁷ *Art and Scholasticism and The Frontiers of Poetry*, trans Joseph W. Evans, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1974), pg. 33.

Art in general tends to make a work. But certain arts tend to make beautiful work, and there they differ essentially from all the others...The work to which the fine arts tend is ordered to beauty; as beautiful, it is an end, an absolute, suffices of itself...

In other words, the artist, *as an artist*, moved by the free creativity of the spirit and not by the possibility of praise or gain, desires to create beautiful works. Why is this so?

Beauty is the higher meaning of the work and the essence of fullness. From *Sources of the Self to A Secular Age* Taylor philosophically locates fullness in the good, yet, by implication and within the Thomist tradition, beauty always accompanies the good.

Therefore, Maritain's inclusion of beauty is appropriate here. However, examples employed earlier in this study demonstrate that much modern art contains disorder and ugliness, but we may characterize this as the pain of missing the joy and delight of beauty. Taylor described the experience of fullness as punctuated moments 'of peace or wholeness' which are accompanied by the passions of 'joy and fulfillment' (Taylor, 2007, pg. 5). Taylor's description of fullness comports, in some sense, with Maritain's definition of beauty.

Maritain obtained his definition of beauty from Aquinas, i.e., it is 'that which pleases when seen,' and the three conditions for beauty are integrity, proportion and radiance.²³⁸ According to Maritain, the concept of 'vision' includes 'intuitive knowledge and joy.' Beauty is 'grasped' by the senses as well as 'found' in the intellect. A true experience of beauty must move a person affectively, and be understood as beautiful by the intellect. Thus, the beautiful is that which gives joy when known experientially. Maritain writes (Maritain, 2021, pg. 147),

Beauty consists of intuitive knowledge, and delight. Beauty makes us delighted in the very act of knowing - a delight which overflows from the thing this act attains.

Similarly, Christopher Sevier notes that, for Aquinas, 'when seen' includes a pleasant *experience* of the object, not merely a visual inspection or observation.²³⁹ The delight of the experience of beauty increases as the viewed object communicates intuitive knowledge

²³⁸ Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism and The Frontiers of Poetry* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1974), pgs. 23, 24. Here Maritain draws from Thomas Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 5, art. 4, ad. 1.

²³⁹ Christopher Scott Sevier, *Aquinas on Beauty*, (New York and London: Lexington Books, 2015), pg., 13.

(Maritain, 2021, pg. 206). Maritain believed that these objects - works *of* art - express an intuitive - thus experiential - knowledge of the world and, therefore, can draw the soul beyond that order, ultimately toward God. According to Maritain, all beauty is a reflection of divine beauty and thus functions as a pointer to God and an indicator of his presence (Maritain, 2021, pg. 12). Beauty, as such, has innumerable possible manifestations because it flows from God's own creative work of beauty.

Philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto would disagree with Maritain. Danto suggests that beauty is no longer considered a defining component of modern art.²⁴⁰ Maritain might reply that in modern aesthetic philosophy, beauty may not be *considered* a necessary component or defining characteristic of art, but, in reality, it is. Beauty is necessary because the free creativity of the spirit gives free creativity to the artist, whose purpose is to bring forth beauty, as the First Artist did.

According to Maritain, what is clearly shown in created works is the presence of the First Poet. God knows himself in his very essence and existence, and in this way, he knows his works. This is the analogy of human poetry. In other words, art - the internal disposition, a habit and virtue that resides within the artist - is free from the utilitarian rules and purposes of craftsmanship. The craftsman's creativity is formed, or informed, by the intention of the work. If the craftsman was going to make a chair, then he must follow the rules for making a chair. Poetry is unhindered by such rules because, like the First Poet, the creative intuition, or creative intellect, is formative and forming of the work. Therefore, the artist, like God, communicates his- or her own subjectivity through their works.

This explains why Maritain was able to make peace with modern art. Modern artists saw the rules for the making of works of art had been dissolved, and are now free to operate

²⁴⁰ Arthur Danto, *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and The Concept of Art* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 2003), pgs. 6-12.

from their creative intuition, their inner disposition, creating works of art from the subjectivity of the artist. What this means is that artists create art in much the same way as God creates his works. In previous eras, artist's works were appreciated for how well they represented or imitated - *mimesis* - the outside world. Modern art brings an essential shift of focus. Now the goal is to incarnate the subjectivity of the artist in the work so that the viewer shares in the artist's experience. Art and works of art are now created as an 'encounter of persons'.²⁴¹

2.5 Art As The Encounter Of Persons

This new orientation of modern art is why it can function as a medium for the experience fullness. According to Taylor, the experience of fullness can be 'deeply moving' and 'inspiring' within that space.²⁴² The experience of fullness 'can help us rise to be the kind of person we desire to be' through shared experiences.²⁴³ This is why human beings can be so attracted to art. Through the works of others, we not only share in their story, but we often hear our own. There exists a connection of desires and experiences, the sharing of emotions, over a range of time and circumstances that is compelling to the human soul in search of fullness. Rubin expresses it (Rubin, 2023, pg. 177),

The goal of art isn't perfection. The goal is to share who we are. And how we see the world. Artists allow us to see what we are unable to see, but somehow already know. It may be a view of the world singularly different from our own. Or one so close, it seems miraculous, as if the artist is looking through our own eyes. In either case, the artist's perception reminds us of who we are and who we can be.

What Rubin is describing is an experience that is of a similar nature to the experience of fullness that can take place in the shared experience of artist and viewer through the work of

²⁴¹ William Dyrness, 'Subjectivity, The Person, And Modern Art: Theological Reflections on Jacques Maritain and Charles Taylor,' pg. 92.

²⁴² *A Secular Age*, pg., 5.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, pg., 6.

art. Therefore, the artist, like the First Poet, is called upon to manifest their own self and subjectivity in the work. Maritain shares Rubin's perspective (Maritain, 2021, pgs. 103-104),

At this point we see how essential to poetry is the subjectivity of the poet... I mean subjectivity in its deepest sense, that is, the substantial totality of the human person... In a similar way to that which divine creation presupposes the knowledge God has of his own essence, poetic creation presupposes, as a primary requirement, a grasping, by the poet, of his own subjectivity, in order to create.

Philosopher Francis Schaeffer offers a word of exhortation in a similar vein to artists who are Christians. Schaeffer discourages the use of the term 'Christian artist'. He notes that a 'Christian artist' often takes a 'Christian theme' and attempts to package it into some artistic medium. In this case the communication of the 'theme' becomes more important than the quality of the work of art. This is not how the artist who is a Christian should work, according to Schaeffer. This methodology of creation produces nothing more than evangelistic 'tracts' and, often, not very good ones. In Schaeffer's opinion, the work of art produced in this way is shallow and more like propaganda than art. Schaeffer's admonition to artists who are Christian is simple: make good art.²⁴⁴ Schaeffer would affirm Rubin and Maritain on this point.

Poetry as a process is not about the poet knowing the self; it is about tapping into the powers of the 'soul' - sensation, imagination, intellect, and will - in order to bring out something of the artist, going inward in order to bring out the artist's own subjectivity *as seen clearly in the work*. O'Reilly concurs, 'Any attitude, point of view or feeling communicated in a work of art does in some sense...exist in the maker.'²⁴⁵ Rubin also concurs, 'Art is a reflection of the artist's inner and outer world *during the period of creation*' (Rubin, 2023, pg. 171, emphasis mine). He adds,

Yet, the totality of the artist's Self cannot be brought into any one work. The Self is akin to a light prism. Events enter the Self even as light enters a prism, and are refracted into an array of perceptions, sensations, emotions and desires. Something of the experience, a particular ray of light, can then be the essence of the work. Thus, no one work tells the artist's entire story' (Rubin, 2023, pg. 364).

²⁴⁴ Francis Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 1973), pg., 54.

²⁴⁵ Kevin O'Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception: A Thomistic Perspective* (Four Courts Press, 2007), pg. 95.

Yet, the poet/artist can only know himself through engagement with the exterior world. Maritain explains (Maritain, 2021, pg. 104-105),

[T]he poet knows himself only on condition that things resound in him, and that in him, at a single waking, they come forth together out of sleep. In other words, the primary requirement of poetry, which is obscure knowing, by the poet, of his own subjectivity, is inseparable from, is one with another requirement - the grasping, by the poet, of the objective reality of the outer and inner world: not by means of concepts and conceptual knowledge, but by means of an obscure knowledge which I shall describe in a moment as knowledge through affective union.

William Dyrness affirms this sentiment. An ‘uncontested observation’ regarding art is that ‘modern art is consistent in its celebration of subjectivity and personal expression’ in both creating and experiencing art. He writes,²⁴⁶

One of the few relatively uncontested observations about modern art is its consistent celebration of subjectivity and personal expression. Both making and experiencing art, since Impressionism at least, has come to be an encounter of persons. To be sure, art still embodies the textures, colors, and sounds that give it a physical existence; but its formation and reception, what we call aesthetics, necessarily involves personal experience. Modern artists quarrel about many things, but they share the conviction that art, when it is authentic and serious, expresses the freedom and depths of the human self.

The sharing of the subjectivity of the self through a work of art is so crucial to ‘authentic’ and ‘serious’ art that Dyrness characterizes it as ‘an encounter of persons.’

Therefore, to know himself the poet must know the outer and inner world. He must be actively engaged with the external world. The inward journey requires outward reality.

Poetry and *art* thus require the whole person: body, soul, spirit, mind, will and emotions.

All that he discerns and divines in things, he discerns and divines not as something *other* than himself, according to the law of speculative knowledge, but on the contrary, and inseparable from himself and his emotion, and in truth as identified with himself (Maritain, 2021, pg. 105).

Therefore, the creative intuition within the human soul is the understanding of the artist of his own self and of exterior things in a knowledge through union or connaturality and bears fruit, ‘which fructifies’ *only in the work*. The intellectual germ, i.e., this knowledge of the self and the world, is a kind of revelation (Maritain, 2021, pg. 105),

[T]he humble revelation, virtually contained in a small lucid cloud of inescapable intuition, both of the Self of the poet and of some particular flash of reality in the God-made universe; a particular flash of reality bursting forth in its unforgettable individuality, but infinite in its meanings and echoing capacity - To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ William Dyrness, ‘Subjectivity, The Person, And Modern Art: Theological Reflections on Jacques Maritain and Charles Taylor,’ pg. 92.

²⁴⁷ Quotation from William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*, 1.

He adds (Maritain, 2021, pg. 106),

A direct inquiry into the inner functioning of the intellect in its preconceptual life makes us realize that poetic intuition and poetic knowledge are both basic manifestations of man's spiritual nature, and the primary requirement of the creativity of the spirit steeped in imagination and emotion.

What is the nature of this knowledge? Maritain calls this *connatural*. The nature of connatural knowledge is that it is 'in accordance with our very being' (*con-natural*). It is gained through inclination and is centered on what and who we are; it is found in our disposition, appetites, desires and affections. It is gained through union, or relationship, with the other; it is the intellect together with affections and dispositions of the will. This is not rational knowledge obtained through discursive exercise of reason. It is this kind of knowledge that Maritain sees operating in and through the artist in the creation of her work.

Potter explains that connaturality (Potter, 2018, pg. 87),

describes the nature of the deep, correlative relationship between Self and Things - the intuitive sense of a connection between one's own consciousness and the mysterious participation in Being itself. The artist is the one able to intuit [know without the use of reason or rationality] not just the inner life of things, but of her own interior life in a single moment, then manifest them in concrete details of a work, particularly through its affective qualities.

Connaturality is a primary theme for Maritain. The artist must be fully engaged with and in the world. The artist knows things, i.e., has a knowledge about the world through experience and emotions. Maritain calls this 'affective union' (Maritain, 2021, pg. 105). It is a kind of knowledge that is experiential and has no parallel in reasoning. It is through this experiential knowledge that the artist grasps, or apprehends, things of the world and the self, although, according to Maritain, obscurely (Maritain, 2021, pg. 106). In other words, this knowledge possesses a measure of indistinctness or lacks an absolutely clear delineation of the content; what the artist knows remains somewhat unclear. This is why the artist must create the work. Knowledge through inclination, emotions, or desire is connatural because it is in accordance with our being. However, it is an accurate source of knowledge. This knowledge is then communicated through the work. The artist shares their own subjectivity creatively, not discursively, aesthetically, not speculatively.

Maritain senses the gravity of his proposition and asks, ‘How can emotion be thus raised to the level of intellect and, as it were, take the place of the concept in becoming for the intellect a determining means or instrumental vehicle through which reality is grasped?’ (Maritain, 2021, pg. 110). In other words, how can emotion be a vehicle of knowledge analogous to the way speculative knowledge obtains intellectual knowledge? Moreover, how can that knowledge be communicated through the work? Emotions and subjectivity can be raised to the level of intellect because the artist *knows with her hands* and ‘speaks’ through her work.

How does this relate to Taylor’s secular age theory? A characteristic of the immanent frame is its Post-Romantic impulse, discussed in Chapter Three, that was manifested in the *Age of Authenticity*. Taylor suggests that a significant shift took place which he calls the *Expressivist Turn*. This Romantic expressivism became the foundation for a more robust individuation, which placed a premium on a person’s inner voice as a place of truth (Taylor, 1989, pg. 368). The aesthetic becomes an ethical category. Thus, a person can discover how to be one with nature - the exterior world and their own - and how to unlock its secrets by turning inward (Taylor, 2007, pg. 461). Emotions, passions and subjectivity can be raised to the level of intellect because artists know with their hands. They work with and communicate through materials and material objects. Art was no longer characterized by representation or imitation - *mimesis*. Rather, now the role art comes to play is the communication of the subjectivity of the artist in hopes of sharing their experiences of the self and the world. Works of art became a space for people to encounter each other, it offers an encounter of persons. Creative intuition and connaturality are the interior mechanisms which are the origins of Romantic expressivism. Moreover, works of art become mediums for the experience of fullness because, in an important sense, we are now all Romantics.

3 The Creation of Works of Art

3.1 *The Longing To Transcend*

How does the artist move from poetic knowledge or creative intuition to the production of a finished work of art? It has been demonstrated that the interior life of the artist, the poetic intuition, is the source of creativity from which they work. How, then, does the actual creation of works of art come about? Maritain writes (Maritain, 2021, pg. 155),

In poetry, there is only the urge to give expression to that knowledge which is poetic intuition, and in which is both the subjectivity of the poet and the realities of the world awake obscurely in a single awakening.

Karl Rahner describes it this way,²⁴⁸

Whatever is expressed in art is a product of human transcendental by which, as spiritual and free beings, we strive for the totality of all reality. It is only because from the start we are beings that transcend every limit, that can never stop, that are always reaching for the incomprehensible mystery; it is only because we are transcendent beings that art and theology can exist.

Rubin adds (Rubin, 2023, pg. 31),

The act of creation is an attempt to enter a mysterious realm. A longing to transcend. What we create allows us to share glimpses of an inner landscape, one that is beyond our understanding. Art is our portal to the unseen world.

When entering into the activity of creation and making, the artist intends to transcend, transcend themselves as a self, and enter into new realms of reality, and thus, having entered, strives to bring about something new. They are not trying to live normal life; they are trying to move beyond it.

Rubin sounds like Maritain here (Maritain, 2021, pg. 117) when he says that this spiritual reality, this spiritual way of looking at the world, is what provides the artist with a deeper understanding behind the surface things of the world. Thus, what will eventually be the work of art will possess the capacity to speak and reveal even beyond what the artist may have intended. It can point the viewer to the transcendent, i.e., to the unseen realities of the

²⁴⁸ Karl Rahner, "Art Against the Horizon of Theology and Piety," in *Theological Investigations* XXIII, trans. By Joseph Donceel, S.J., and Hugh M. Riley (New York: Crossroad, 1992), pg. 165, cited in Richard Viladesau, *Theological Aesthetics: God In Imagination, Beauty and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press:1999), pg. 18.

world. Works of art can reveal the ‘secret senses’ of things. Maritain explains (Maritain, 2021, pg. 115),

For poetic intuition makes things which it grasps diaphanous and alive, and populated with infinite horizons. As grasped by poetic knowledge, things abound in significance, and swarm with meanings. Things are not only what they are. They ceaselessly pass beyond themselves, and give more than they have, because from all sides they are permeated by the activating influx of the Prime Cause.

David Brown recognizes the drive to connect with God through creative activity. He writes,²⁴⁹

If God really is our Creator, then the urge to deepen contact with him is likely to permeate human creativity in whatever form it is found.

It is this *spiritual* component that is invested into the work that permits ‘access to something bigger’ through the work (Rubin, 2023, pg. 33).

Neo-Thomist anthropology is again alluded to here. Humanity is the horizon between heaven and earth thus human creative works are the threshold to that horizon. According to Rubin and Maritain, representing both the Christian and non-Christian perspectives, artists recognize that this is the purpose which the modern artist has for the work. For Rubin, ‘art is the portal to the unseen world.’ Rubin, perhaps unknowingly, is in agreement with Dante Alighieri: art is seen to be God’s grandchild. Therefore, art can be a medium for the experience of fullness or transcendence.

3.2 Poetic Experience

Maritain has spoken of *poetic knowledge* and *poetic intuition*. He introduces a new concept: *poetic experience*. He describes *poetic experience* as a ‘more complex’ concept in that *poetic experience* ‘is a certain state the soul’ which causes either artist or viewer to stop and focus on the artistic experience they are having at the moment. How can an aesthetic

²⁴⁹ David Brown, *Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pg. 222.

experience of art be a medium for the experience of fullness? The *poetic experience* is the dynamic mechanism for such an experience.

Poetic experience has its origin in a profound encounter with the created world. It is an experience which comes about through an emotion stirring within the depths of subjectivity. Moreover, it is orientated toward *expression*. It is born in the inner depths and for the artist it ends in a work produced.

Poetic experience is distinct from poetic knowledge and poetic intuition. It is a certain state of the soul in which an experience of the world by the self makes the ordinary traffic of our thinking stop for a while (Maritain, 2021, pg. 219). The artist is captured in that their subjectivity is intensely drawn towards an object. The artist becomes absorbed with the reality encountered. Poetic experience is the ‘What is happening to me?’ psychosomatic response to the experience. For some reason, intuitively the person cannot move away. The experience has taken hold of the affective intuitions of the person, and a fascination is created. Poetic experience seems to be the same kind of experience that Taylor described as the ‘wow!’ moment of the experience of fullness.²⁵⁰

Poetic experience has two phases. Although ‘Everything seems to be given at once’ as though it were from the outside, in reality, everything which emerges in the creative space was actually already inside, inside the soul. The poetic experience gives birth to the ‘beginning of a song,’ or ‘an outburst of unstoppable words’ (Maritain, 2021, pg. 223). This is an internal, even natural phenomenon, although not continuous nor even frequent (Maritain, 2021, pg. 224). Poetic experience is not a part of the structure of the work; the artist cannot plan to include poetic experience in a certain portion of the work. Poetic experience is subjective. It can happen at any moment in the aesthetic experience of the work.

²⁵⁰ *A Secular Age*, pg., 518.

Some aspect of the work captures the attention of the artist or viewer. The artist is now inspired to manifest their knowledge in a work.

Inspiration, however, cannot give form without the inclusion of the operation of the reason (Maritain, 2021, pg. 226). Inspiration is only the source, a source that is operative in all facets of the creation. As a second phase, the artist must furnish the tools of reason and logic in order to bring out the form of what the work is to be. The virtues of art must be employed. The totality of the work is never passive. Great creative effort must be expended to see the work through to completion.²⁵¹

Maritain has taken us through the entire creative process, from its origin in the soul of the artist in the faculty of *poetry*, through the processing of the concepts in the Illuminating Intellect, to the artist tapping into her own subjectivity and connatural knowledge of her world. What the artist knows, and experiences of the world and the things of the world are manifest in a poetic experience which moves the artist to do the work. As much as art is a virtue of the Practical Intellect, the interiority of art must find its way into a created form. The production of the work of art will culminate in the sharing of the artist's own subjectivity. The shared experience of the work by the artist and the viewer will crescendo in an encounter of persons.

²⁵¹ Sir Paul McCartney recalls how he wrote the song, *Yesterday*: 'I woke up one morning with this tune in my head, and I thought, "I don't know this tune, or do I?" It's like an old jazz tune or something, 'cuz my dad used to know a lot of old jazz stuff, and maybe I just remembered it. So I went to the piano and found the cords for it... and, um, I just made sure I remembered it. Then I hawked it around to all my friends... it was good little tune, you know, and I couldn't have written it, 'cuz I just dreamed it, you know, you don't get that lucky.' He then went to the piano to apply his craft of songwriting in order to bring to reality what was happening in his poetic intuition. See: *How Paul McCartney wrote 'Yesterday'*; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-P3UpuGnYKA>; accessed 17 September 2021.

4 Conclusion: An Aesthetic Framework For Fullness

In conclusion, I maintain that Maritain is crucial to the thesis that art and the aesthetic experience of art can function as a medium for the experience of fullness. This is because Maritain offers an aesthetic answer to Taylor's philosophical notion of the experience of fullness. Art and the aesthetic experience of art can be a medium for the experience of fullness.

More importantly, however, Maritain's theory of art allows us to achieve the aim of this thesis which is take Taylor a step further than he himself goes. Ultimately, I want to propose that experiences of fullness through the medium of art can be a theological vehicle for secular people to encounter or move toward God.

This chapter has offered three reasons why this is possible. First, Maritain's theory of art runs parallel to Taylor's concept of fullness, yet goes beyond it. I maintain that Maritain has been in Taylor's philosophical space the entire time. If it were possible to have both Taylor and Maritain at the same forum discussion and Taylor was to explain his theory of fullness, Maritain would reply, 'Yes, that is what I am talking about, only from an aesthetic perspective.' So Maritain provides an aesthetic answer to Taylor's philosophical notion of fullness.

Second, however, Maritain's theory of art has its origin in transcendence. The human activity of art is a virtue or disposition of the human inner life and faculties. Maritain draws on Neo-Thomist anthropology that humanity is the horizon between heaven and earth. He posits that human beings possess the dynamic faculty of *poetry*. Poetry affords the possibility for the person to reach into heavenly realities and to access deep truths regarding the material and spiritual realities. For Raïssa Maritain, the poets, artists, great inventors and saints - all who draw on the divine source - are all imitators of God.²⁵² Like God, what they create

²⁵² Raïssa Maritain, *Poetry and Mysticism*, pg. 6.

possesses something of their own subjectivity, yet goes beyond even that. These experiences are understood or brought to light for the artist by an interior principle acknowledged by Christians and non-Christians alike. Whether it is called an Illuminating Intellect in the Maritain/Neo-Thomist tradition or The Source in secular terminology, the principle is identical. This principle provides human beings with the ability to know and understand transcendent truths of the material and spiritual world, even Truth Itself.

Third, all of this comes together in the creation of works of art. The artist, by the very nature of *creative intuition* and the creation of art, longs to transcend. The artist is in the realm of the transcendent in the very act of creating works of art. This is based on the presumption of the presence of God in the art-act. The sharing of the work is an encounter of persons. The artist's own experience of something greater than themselves, something transcendent, is then articulated through the work. The artist issues an invitation to the viewers to enter a vision of reality-beyond-reality, and to share a similar experience.

Therefore, I maintain that this goes beyond Taylor, who holds that fullness is a reflection of transcendence. Transcendence is the meaning of fullness; it is the goal. Maritain tells how it is that human beings access and participate in transcendence through aesthetic experiences of art. Maritain opens the way for the medium of art to be a theological vehicle for secular people to encounter or move toward God.

In the next chapter, we will pursue an explanation of how a work of art is received, and what effect that experience can have on the viewer of a work of art.

The Effects of Works of Art

The previous chapter examined Jacques Maritain's theory of art as it applied to the creation of works of art. The objective of this chapter is to look at how works of art affect the viewer according to Maritain's theory and how these effects advance Taylor's theory of the experience of fullness. The argument will proceed in five sections. The first section will explain what can be known from a work of art. The second section examines Nicholas Wolterstorff's concept of world-projection through works of art. *World-projection* is one of the fundamentally most important actions an artist performs. The artist presents a world in the work for the viewer to contemplate. The third section will examine philosopher Arthur Danto's theory of interpretation of art. It will demonstrate that art can be interpreted at various levels. At the level of deep interpretation, the viewer can receive something from the work that the artist may not have intended. This level of interpretation can take the viewer to more profound truths about the world. The fourth section will explore the need for works of art to be contemplated if meaning is to be derived from them. Art must be engaged with over time and with intentionality in order for the viewer to truly interpret a work. Together, these points demonstrate that art can be a medium for Taylor's theory of the experience of fullness. Taylor posits that the experience of fullness can happen in an activity or event.

The fifth section concludes that an aesthetic experience of art can venture beyond the concept that art can be a medium of fullness. We are reminded that art is a *locus theologicus* and thus a person can be drawn to God through the experience of art. Aesthetic experiences of works of art can take the viewers to the threshold of the divine mysteries, where, as *imago Dei*, they can enter in.

1 What is Known?

What is received through a work of art is an aesthetic experience that can communicate connatural, intuitive, and cognitive understanding of the reality of things in the world, and of the subjectivity of the poet/artist, i.e., what he knows of the world. Kevin O'Reilly describes it thus,²⁵³

Moreover, the grasping of things, together with the awakening of subjectivity itself, is ordered to the expression of the subjectivity of the artist in the work that issues from the creativity of the spirit... The principle element, however, is the experience of the self. For it is only when subjectivity awakens to itself that emotion received in the spiritual preconscious of the intellect is made intentional and intuitive, that is to say, the instrument of knowledge through connaturality.

Therefore, what can be known through the work is the subjectivity of the poet. In other words, the viewer can share in the poet's experience(s) of the world. For example, *Starry Night* depicts painter Vincent van Gogh's battle with depression and mental illness and his time in an asylum.²⁵⁴ Recording artist Ed Sheeran tells the story of turning thirty years of age, getting married and becoming a father, through the 2021 album '=' *Equals*.²⁵⁵ Kevin O'Reilly captures the sense well (O'Reilly, 2007, pg. 171),

[T]he artistic artifact is a revelation [of] both the subjective and objective poles of experience - of the subjectivity of the artist and of whatever reality poetic knowledge delivers to her... Whatever artistic medium (poetry, painting, music), in it alone is poetic intuition objectivized... Art is a reflection of the artist's inner and outer world during the period of creation.

²⁵³ Kevin O'Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception: A Thomistic Perspective*, pg. 58.

²⁵⁴ Alicia du Plessis, "'Starry Night' van Gogh – In-Depth Analysis and Facts," *Art In Context* 21 October, 2021; <https://artincontext.org/starry-night-van-gogh/>; accessed 8 December, 2023. The author describes the work: 'Vincent van Gogh did not have an easy life, he experienced considerable mental challenges and struggles that undoubtedly affected the way he made his art, and possibly even enhanced his own personal style. He was a man deeply devoted to depicting beautiful scenes of the natural world in rich textures and colors that not only showed his expressive artistic style, but also his inner world. This inner world was seemingly just like his use of complementary colors, a mix of inner turmoil, but not without a mix of his sincere appreciation of the beauty of the world he experienced during the day and night. Vincent van Gogh was sadly his own victim, committing suicide in the end and leaving all his artwork to his brother Theo van Gogh, but it was his collection of artworks that continued his legacy and lives on for him.'

²⁵⁵ Sheeran said of the album: 'The theme of the record is me turning 30, becoming a dad, losing a friend, trying to balance work and marriage. It's stuff that really has meant a lot to me.' <https://genius.com/albums/Ed-sheeran/Equals>.

This may be why human beings are so attracted to art. Through the works of others, we not only share in their story, but we may often hear our own. There exists a connection of passions and experiences, the resonances of emotions, over a range of time and circumstances that can be extremely compelling to a person in search of fullness. As Dyrness has said, the experience of art is an ‘encounter of persons.’ Rick Rubin explains (Rubin, 2023, pg. 73),

[T]he attraction of art is the humanity held in it. If we were machinelike, the art wouldn’t resonate. It would be soulless. With life comes pain, insecurity, and fear... We create pieces reflective of who we are, and if insecurity is part of who we are, then our work will have a greater degree of truth in it as a result.

Like speaks to like. Rubin expresses it well (Rubin, 2023, pg. 177-178),

One reason art resonates is because human beings are so similar. We’re attracted to the shared experience held within the work. Including the imperfection in it. We recognize some part of ourselves and feel understood. And connected.

Maritain’s concept of poetry as a process is not about the artist knowing the self; poetry is about tapping into the depths of the artist’s emotions, experiences and imagination in order to bring something of the self out; going inward in order to bring out their own subjectivity that is to be communicated through the work, in order to share that with others in the human community.

It is in the work alone that the subjectivity and poetic experience of the artists come to objectivization. Yet, through the work more than the subjectivity of the artist can be seen.

The work will reveal the ‘secret’ things of the world. The work will ‘say more than it is.’

Maritain explains (Maritain, 2021, pg. 117),

The work will make present to our eyes, together with itself, something else, and still something else, still something else indefinitely, in the infinite mirrors of analogy... Thus it is that poetry captures the secret sense of things, and the all-embracing sense, still more secret, of subjectivity obscurely revealed.

Although the artist has an intention and communicates their own subjectivity through the work, much more can be heard through the work. Maritain writes (Maritain, 2021, pg. 115),

Such is, I think, the thing grasped by poetic intuition: the singular existent which resounds in the subjectivity of the poet, together with all other realities which echo this existent, and which it conveys in the manner of a sign... The thing grasped has ‘infinite openness to the riches of being.’

In other words, the artist will have an intention for the work, but the work may produce echoes or resonances of other truths and realities. Maritain utilises a concept akin to the Aristotelian maxim that something, or a thing, is more than the sum of its parts.²⁵⁶

2 World-projection

2.1 *The World Presented in the Work*

The action of world-projection was introduced in Chapter One and is relevant to the story told by artists through their art. According to Nicholas Wolterstorff, world-projection is an action that an artist performs ‘*by means of his artifact*’ (emphasis original).²⁵⁷ World-projection, according to Wolterstorff, ‘is perhaps the most pervasive and important actions that artists perform by means of their artifacts’ (Wolterstorff, 1980, pg. 122). This is the factor by which viewers find works of art significant and impactful. World-projection is the artist ‘projecting’ or ‘presenting’ to the viewer, ‘a world for our consideration’ (Wolterstorff, 1980, pg. 123). This is the world projected through the work itself.²⁵⁸ For example, a fiction novel may contain historical accuracies, i.e., it may be set in a time and situation that actually existed. Moreover, it may contain characters that actually existed in history. These elements are part of the ‘real’ world of history. However, it is the world occurring within the work itself that is being presented to the reader. The artist and the historian are of different kinds in that the artist has the ability to imagine a world that is distinct from the real world. Wolterstorff attributes

²⁵⁶ Aristotle actually said that, ‘[T]he whole is something besides that parts,’ (*Metaphysics*, 980a). As well, ‘[T]hat the whole is not the same as the sum of the parts are useful in meeting the type just described; for a man who defines in this way seems to assert that the parts are the same as the whole. The arguments are particularly appropriate in cases where the process of putting the parts together is obvious, as in a house and other things of that sort; for there, clearly, you may have the parts and yet not have the whole, so that parts and whole cannot be the same’ (*Metaphysics*, 100a).

²⁵⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art In Action*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pg., 122.

²⁵⁸ Wolterstorff considers the theory of world-projection from two directions. First, is the concept of world-projection describing a ‘relational property belonging to artefacts’ by which the artefact itself projects some world? Alternatively, is world-projection an action of the artist who projects a world through the artefact? Wolterstorff affirms the latter position. See: Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art*, ed. L. Jonathan Cohen, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pg., 198.

this to the artist's power of *envisagement*. The artist is not simply holding a mirror up to the world. The artist is one who presents the world, or a world, often as a figure of what *could be* in the real world.

The world presented by the artist, if the story is a good one, will be 'believable' (Wolterstorff, 1980, pg. 123). The reader can enter that world, find a place in it, and participate in the story. The readers find themselves experiencing what Tolkien calls 'secondary belief.'²⁵⁹ The reader or viewer takes in what is 'true' according to the laws of the fictional world of the work. They move around in the world of the work, which is distinct from the actual world. Yet, and this is the important point for Wolterstorff, the artist or writer, though presenting a fictional world, can make claims about the actual world (Wolterstorff, 1980, pg. 125),

Though fictionally projecting a world distinct from the actual world is not to be identified with making false claims about the actual world, still it may be the case that *by way of* fictionally projecting his distinct world the fictioneer may make a claim, true or false as the case may be, about our actual world. By telling his story he may make a point; by presenting his situation he may put forth a message.

An example not used by Wolterstorff but which illustrates his point is the book *Animal Farm* (1945) by George Orwell.²⁶⁰ In that world, animals take over a farm in an attempt to create a utopian life in which all animals are equal. The reader knows that the presented world does not actually exist. However, Orwell's message through the work is about the actual world.

Animal Farm is an allegory about Communist Russia under Josef Stalin.²⁶¹

Wolterstorff gives seven possible benefits of world-projection.²⁶² The first six benefits are: 1) World-projection is *confirmatory*. The artist projects significant aspects of the beliefs of their community. It serves to confirm for the community its 'religious convictions' and 'self-image,' rather than present new ones. For example, the sculptures of ancient Greece

²⁵⁹ Here Wolterstorff quotes J.R.R. Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories,' *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*, ed. C.S. Lewis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), pg. 51.

²⁶⁰ George Orwell, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1945).

²⁶¹ For an excellent review and synopsis of *Animal Farm*, see Dr. Oliver Tearle, 'A Summary and Analysis of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*,' *Interesting Literature*, May 2020; <https://interestingliterature.com/2020/05/a-summary-and-analysis-of-george-orwells-animal-farm/>; accessed 10 November, 2023.

²⁶² Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, pgs., 144-147.

give evidence of the importance of the human body for that community (Wolterstorff, 1980, pg. 145). 2) It provides *illumination*. This is antithetical to confirmation. Here the artist stands opposed to their society or culture. The goal is not to confirm culture's convictions but rather to overturn them by illuminating those convictions 'so as to thereby awaken' the society to another way. The intention of the artist is to provoke the society to new action based on the new vision provided by the artist. Given the pluralistic nature of modern society, Wolterstorff suggests that a particular artist gives expression to 'the vision of a certain *sub-community*' (Wolterstorff, 1980, pg. 146). Dada could be an example of such a sub-community. 3) The artist may present a world which the viewer judges to be better than their actual world. The viewer momentarily 'escapes' their current situation in order to take refuge in a world that is better than their own (Wolterstorff, 1980, pg. 147). 4) Through the world presented in the work, the artist can evoke emotion in the viewer, even though the viewer knows that nothing about the projected world is real in the actual world. It is universally accepted that works of art can profoundly move a person in a variety of ways: fear, grief, exhilaration, joy, and other profound emotions (Wolterstorff, 1980, pg. 148). 5) The fifth benefit is what psychologists call *modelling*. Studies have shown that when person A observes person B perform an action, person A can develop the ability and the tendency to produce that same action. Works of art which visually present such action are more effective than purely literary presentations of actions. Specifically, observing acts of violence in film tends to increase incidents of violence for certain viewers (Wolterstorff, 1980, pg. 148-149). 6) Perhaps the most well-known benefit is *communication*. In other words, the artist uses the fictional world to communicate something about the actual world. Wolterstorff acknowledges that there are more benefits than he has enumerated here. The value of a particular benefit may depend on the era, culture, people or community, or some other factor. This highlights the selection of the seventh

benefit for this era and for this dissertation: it comports with Taylor's concept for the experience of fullness as most relevant for our time.

The seventh benefit, the benefit of *consolation*, is most useful for this dissertation as it comports well with Taylor's concept of fullness. Wolterstorff calls upon Tolkien to explain (Wolterstorff, 1980, pg. 149).²⁶³ The Consolation is the Happy Ending of fictional stories. Tolkien calls it *Eucatastrophe*; it is the antithesis of the tragic ending. The Consolation contains 'the sudden joyous "turn"' in which all will end well. This is not essentially 'escapist' but rather, in the world of the story, 'a sudden and miraculous grace' is experienced by the characters, which points to the possibility of the 'joy of deliverance.' The harsher realities within the story are not denied; rather, and against all evidence, final victory will be achieved. Neither defeat nor evil, no matter how perilous or imminent, will be final. In the midst of the struggle within the story a 'fleeting glimpse of joy' exists.

Through this *euangelium* in the story, the 'underlying reality of truth' is revealed. The consolation is not solely for the fears, pains or sorrows of the story world, but a 'satisfaction' and an 'answer' to the question, 'Is it true?' in our world as well. Tolkien is referring to the truth of the fictional world that can seep past that world and into the actual world.

'Is it true?' The answer to the question that I gave at first was (quite rightly): 'If you have built your little world well, yes: it is true in that world.' But in the 'eucatastrophe' we see in a brief vision that the answer may be greater - it may be a far-off gleam or echo of *euangelium* in the real world.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is such a story.

I maintain that the benefit of consolation corresponds with Taylor's concept of the experience of fullness. Fullness produces moments in which a person glimpses something of what the world could be and the person may respond passionately with joy and a sense of satisfaction. The *euangelium* of the projected world presents the possibility that our experience of the actual world may be 'fuller, richer, deeper, more worth while, more admirable, more what it

²⁶³ Tolkien cites Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (New York: Viking, 1957), pgs., 81-84.

should be' (Taylor, 2007, pg. 5). It can offer the hope that 'moments when the deep divisions, distractions, worries, sadnesses that seem to drag us down are somehow dissolved' (Taylor, 2007, pg. 6). The sudden joyous turn, the miracle of in-breaking grace, and the Happy Ending of the Consolation become ours as the projected world of the work of art seeps into the actual world. It can inspire hope that defeat and evil are not the last words. The viewer may be alerted and inspired, through and by the work, to something greater, higher, beyond themselves, that they can grab hold of. When the benefit of Consolation is included in the story, the experience of fullness is possible.

Aidan Nichols affirms Wolterstorff's assessment, although he uses the terminology of a work of art as 'the shaper of existence.' An artwork 'can be powerful enough to alter the meaning and weight of all the rest of my experience, before and after it.' This is due to the fact that art requires a 'discipline of vision,' by which we learn to look into 'the heart of human life.' In other words, the experience of art can 'shift' a person's understanding of the world. Coming from an experience of a work of art, one can find their 'own existence' reshaped (Nichols, 1980, pg. 100). Nichols then quotes Hans-Georg Gadamer, where Gadamer suggests that in the experience of art there exists a 'fulness of meaning' which comes from the work itself, yet points beyond itself to the infinite:²⁶⁴

The power of the artwork suddenly takes the person experiencing it out of the context of his life, and yet relates him back to the whole of his existence. In the experience of art there is present a fulness of meaning which belongs not only to this particular content or object but stands rather for the meaningful whole of life. An aesthetic experience always contains the experience of an infinite whole. Precisely because it does not combine with others to make one open experiential flow, but immediately represents the whole, its significance is infinite.

Wolterstorff, Nichols and Gadamer all contribute to the point that aesthetic experiences of works of art affect the viewer of art and may offer an opportunity for the experience of fullness. Wolterstorff acknowledges that artists create a world and invite the viewers into it. Nichols holds that the aesthetic experience of the world of the work can shape the viewer's

²⁶⁴ H-G Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London, 1975), pg., 63.

existence. Gadamer posits that in the aesthetic experience of art, there exists a fullness of meaning that relates to the whole of the viewer's life. These authors describe an *aesthetic* experience that comports well with Taylor's descriptions of an experience of fullness.

2.2 Accepting Or Rejecting The Work

The effect of world-projection depends on whether or not the world being projected by the work is affirmed or refused by the viewer. Rik Nieuwenhove describes it this way (Nieuwenhove, 2021, pg. 108),

[B]ecause at a primary level you cannot really *refute* art. You can only affirm or refuse it. Reading Chekov's story [*The Lady and The Lap Dog*] we either consent or affirm ('Yes, that's how things are!') or else we refuse it ('No, the world is not like that'). In the work of art we come to *re-cognize* something, i.e., know it again, by seeing a semblance with our world and the human condition. Affirming its veracity, recognizing that it coheres with what we know of the world, or even by enabling us to see the world in a different light, occurs at a first level - the level of affirmation. In a subsequent move we can then engage in more detailed discussion about the different aspects of the work of art (including its morality, implicit philosophy...).

In other words, the work of art is not initially judged at the aesthetic level by the formal aspects of the work, i.e., the colours used, the shapes, dimensions, sounds, etc. The viewer's response is to either accept or reject the work. To accept the work means to accept the picture of the world that the work is presenting or offering. Through the work, the artist suggests something about what the world is like as they know it or what the world should or could be like. To accept the work means that something resonates with the viewer in the world picture offered by the artist through the work. If the viewer agrees that there is 'truth' in the artistic offering, then world-projection has done its work. The viewer is open to the work and is now able to enter the world of the work in order to 'hear' something regarding the 'real world.' Andrew Greeley describes it this way, 'In fact, what occurs when we are in contact with a work of art is that we re-create the work that the creator has already done' (Greeley, 1988, pg. 19). Entering into the work is what facilitates an experience of fullness.

3 Reception of a Work of Art: Deep Interpretation

3.1 *Surface Versus Deep Interpretation*

The work of art itself is a medium of *potential* communication. According to philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto, interpretation is what makes a work of art a work of art. If the object is uninterpretable, it is not a work of art. For Danto, interpretation is ‘constitutive,’²⁶⁵

[F]or an object is an artwork *at all* only in relation to an interpretation. Interpretation in my sense is transfigurative. It transforms objects into works of art, and depends upon the ‘is’ of artistic identification.

But how is a work of art interpreted? What meaning can the work have, and how many meanings can the work have?

Interpretation involves the objective realities of the object, i.e., what the object or work actually is and how it presents itself, and the subjective capabilities of the interpreter. Interpretation is always the interpretation of something - it cannot exist without an object. Interpretation is the proper activity of the interpreter; it is the attempt to penetrate the meaning of the object.

There are many perspectives on the question of interpretation, yet they can be simplified into two basic frameworks. First, Danto argues that the work must mean whatever the artist as creator intended the work to mean. Interpretation is understanding what the artist felt or knew or experienced and represented in an external work. It is understanding what the artist meant to communicate. The artist wanted to say something, and the piece means what they intended it to say given the situation and context. Danto explains,²⁶⁶

[K]nowing the artist’s interpretation is in effect identifying what he or she has made. The interpretation is not something outside the work: the work and the interpretation arise together in aesthetic consciousness. As interpretation is inseparable from the work, it is inseparable from the artist if it is the artist’s work... The possible interpretations are constrained by the artist’s location in the world, by when and where he lived, by what experiences he had... There is truth to interpretation and a stability to works of art which are not relative at all.

²⁶⁵ Arthur Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pgs. 41-44.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 45-46.

This is called ‘surface interpretation.’²⁶⁷

[S]urface interpretation undertakes to characterize the external behaviour of an agent with reference to the internal representation of it presumed to be the agent’s, and the agent is in some privileged position with regard to what his representations are.

In this way, the artist is in an authoritative position to say what the work of art means.

Additionally, Aidan Nichols, suggests that the particular cultural setting of the work must be taken into account. Each cultural setting has its own set of what Nichols calls, *iconology*, or a set of symbols which convey certain meanings. To some degree, the artist must conform the work to the cultural *iconology*, or else the work cannot be understood in its setting (Nichols, 1980, pg. 94).

Alternatively, Susan Sontag rejects Danto’s interpretive approach.²⁶⁸ For Sontag, the artist may have an intended meaning, yet this meaning has multiple dimensions. This reality is well accepted based on how often viewers (and reviewers) see things in the work that the artist did not intend. Sontag dismisses the traditional method of interpretation, i.e., that of Danto, in which the work of art must even be ‘about something.’

She also rejects that interpretations are ‘explanatory,’ i.e., the viewer does not need to know much about the artist at all when seeking to interpret a work of art. The work itself gives the viewer all they need to know if an artistic experience is being sought. For Sontag, the key is to pay attention to *it*, the work itself. The artist cannot even know the full depths of the interpretation and is therefore in no authoritative position regarding interpretation. What Sontag is suggesting is that deep interpretation can occlude surface interpretation and *iconology*. Thus, for Sontag, the meaning of the work is derived by the viewer at the time the work is experienced by the viewer. Nothing else is necessary.

Sontag writes (Sontag, 1966, pg. 15),

²⁶⁷ Ibid., pg. 50-51.

²⁶⁸ Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation,” *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), pg. 15.

It doesn't matter whether artists intend, or don't intend, for their works to be interpreted. Perhaps Tennessee Williams thinks *Streetcar* is about what Kazan thinks about it. It may be that Cocteau in *The Blood of a Poet* and in *Orpheus* wanted the elaborate readings which have been given these films, in terms of Freudian symbolism and social critique. But the merit of these works certainly lies elsewhere than in their "meanings." Indeed, it is precisely to the extent that Williams' plays and Cocteau's films do suggest these portentous meanings that they are defective, false, contrived, lacking in conviction.

However, a third possibility is available, through Danto. Danto terms it *deep*

*interpretation*²⁶⁹

Indeed, what deep interpretation undertakes is a kind of understanding of the complex consisting of representations together with the conduct they, at the surface level, enable us to understand; so surface interpretation, when successfully achieved, gives us the interpretanda [to be interpreted] for deep interpretation, the interpretantia [interpreting] for which are to be sought in the depths.

Deep interpretation is seeing meaning in the work that is beyond the intention of the artist, but yet within the parameters set by the surface interpretation. In other words, the viewer cannot claim an interpretation of the work that could not be derived from the surface interpretation in some sense. Yet the viewer may come away with an interpretation that is more profound.

For example, one viewer had a deeply moving *poetic experience* while viewing *The Portrait of Jeanne Kéfer* by Fernand Khnopff (1885). He had a psychosomatic encounter which produced a 'What is happening to me?' moment before the portrait. The work captured his attention and affection.



9. *The Portrait of Jeanne Kéfer*

²⁶⁹ Arthur Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, pg. 52.

Upon reflection and contemplation, i.e., by taking time to listen to the portrait, what was ‘spoken’ was ‘innocence.’ *Jeanne Kéfer*, the work, spoke of the innocence of youth. It spoke to him about simpler times when he was young and free and innocent, not overwhelmed by the distractions and burdens of adult life in today’s world. It created a sense of longing for simplification, decluttering, and less consumption in his own life. To him as a viewer, it offered a world picture of simplification and innocence. The experience of the work inspired him; it gave him a glimpse of what his life could be. What the work spoke to him unsettled him and broke through his ordinary sense of being in the world.²⁷⁰ A new and ‘higher’ aspiration for a richer and fuller life was conceived in his heart. His was an experience of fullness derived from deep interpretation.

Interestingly, this is not what Khnopff actually intended the viewer to see. Khnopff’s intention for the work was to present a child’s sense of ‘vulnerability and uncertainty’ in an adult world.²⁷¹ The viewer’s interpretation is acceptable because seeing *youth*, *innocence*, and *simplification*, while not what the artist intended, is within the plausibility of what a lone young child could communicate. Danto would suggest the surface interpretation ‘does its work’²⁷² so that we ‘know what has been done and why.’ The viewer, according to Danto, is now free to go beyond the surface interpretation if that is what the work speaks. Deep interpretation, however, depends on two things: 1) the hermeneutic one brings to the work of art and, more fundamentally, 2) the willingness of the viewer to be present to the work, i.e., to be open to receive the meaning that is in the work of art.

²⁷⁰ *A Secular Age*, pg. 5. This is how Taylor describes an aspect of the experience of fullness.

²⁷¹ The J. Paul Getty Museum Collection, ‘Jeanne Kéfer, 1895, Ferdinand Khnopff’; <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/107TN1>; accessed November 2022.

²⁷² Danto, *Philosophical Disenfranchisement*, pg., 66.

3.2 The Cycle Of Receptivity

The act of interpretation is ongoing and cyclical. Kevin O'Reilly describes the process as an 'Ever-deepening aesthetic experience of an object is an ever-deepening union with the object.'²⁷³ According to O'Reilly, the cycle of interpretation, or receptivity, runs as follows: First, I encounter contemplatively a work of art. Next, I accept the work (Nieuwenhove) and the world of the work (Wolterstorff). Something of the work and the world of the work resonates with me as a viewer. O'Reilly calls this phase *activity*, i.e., my subjectivity activates in response to what I perceive in the work; the passions as well as the intellect become engaged. Third comes *interpretation*, in which I, the viewer, seek to penetrate the meaning of the object or work. This process can be repeated many times. The viewer can always go deeper in their interpretation and experience with a work of art.

At the end of these judgments, I rest in the delight I take in my current understanding and appreciation of the work of art. However, I will age, be changed by my life experiences and form new presuppositions and perspectives. Over time, this new version of the self engages the world with different knowledge, expanded wisdom, and passion. This newer version of the self sees the world differently. The interpretation of the work of art and its meaning to me at this later stage of life, and in different circumstances, may change as well. This cycle of receptivity and interpretation can be repeated without end and lead to a deeper aesthetic, as well as an intuitive, appreciation of the work over time.

The wonderful aspect of the human activity of the experience of art is that, for the viewer of art, what resonates in the work, the judgments made, and what they delight in are always fluid over the course of time. This is because human lives in the world are not permanent or static. The world is a dynamic place, and human life, perception and experience have a dynamic character. In a sense, we never do the same action twice. *This* moment,

²⁷³ Ibid., pg., 42.

within *this exact* space, will never happen again. This makes the experience of art ever-changing and ever-revelatory. A person could read the same book many times, attend the same exhibit multiple times, contemplate a favourite work many times, and if they look deeply and contemplatively each time, they will, ‘likely find new themes, undercurrents, details and connections.’²⁷⁴ In other words, the viewer receives from the object. This is receptivity. This concurs immediately with *activity* on the part of the subject, in which the passions ignite, and the viewer truly engages with the work. Therefore, the degree to which the subject receives from the work is dependent on the degree of openness to the work.

Therefore, I maintain that an aesthetic experience of works of art for the viewer can be a potentially inexhaustible medium for many experiences of fullness. If fullness is a punctuated moment that directs a person to a higher good, causing the person to feel that they are receiving a glimpse of what life could be like, then the experience of art can provide that, even for a moment. If this does happen, it does so because of deep interpretation. Surface interpretation may even be enough for fullness to occur, at least initially. Something of the subjectivity of the artist and what they know of the world, or God, communicated through the work may well resonate with the viewer. Like speaks to like.

Moreover, I maintain that the initial experience a viewer has with a work of art and the meaning they derive from it will not be the viewer’s last experience with the work, nor the fullest meaning they derive from it. The same work can and will provide many experiences of fullness as the viewer continues to engage with the work over time. The viewer can be escorted to even deeper and more profound levels; something of God, or the things of God, or the knowledge of God, can be seen and experienced by the viewer through ever-deepening interpretations. Aesthetic experiences of works of art can mediate fullness and transcendence because they are the product of the creative activity of *imago Dei*. This is

²⁷⁴ Rick Rubin, *The Creative Act: A Way of Being*, pg. 64.

due to what Maritain termed connaturally, human beings possess the capacity ‘To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower’ (Maritain, 2021, pg. 105).²⁷⁵

3.3 *What If The Work Is Rejected?*

What if the effect of the work on a viewer is negative? The viewer may very well reject the world picture offered by the artist. Let us examine Tracey Emin’s installation piece *My Bed* again. Emin created the piece after several days of languishing in bed following an episode of depression. She had recently experienced a painful ending of a romantic relationship and felt suicidal. The piece consists of Emin’s dishevelled bed, with a variety of sordid items in and around the bed: empty bottles of alcohol, bandages, used tissues, spoiled food, cigarette butts, panties soiled with menstrual blood, contraceptive pills, used condoms and bloodied tampons. The sheets were stained by various bodily fluids: blood, urine and semen.²⁷⁶ If the experience of the work is negative, then the viewer may feel sorrow, dissatisfaction, anger or despair at the world picture offered. A new work of art may be sought out in order to have a more positive experience.

Therefore, works of art can detract from human flourishing, pointing the viewer to a reality that they *should not want*. The ‘worth’ of a piece may be that it ‘disvalues’ life.

O’Reilly describes it this way:²⁷⁷

The objection ought to inevitably arise that many great works of art obviously do not orient us one iota toward ultimate values. This assertion is undeniably true. Their worth consists in the fact that they distill and communicate the disvalues of a particular culture or age in their own unique and powerful way.

Art can ‘actualize a negative potential,’ which causes the viewer to want something *other than* the world projection of the particular piece. O’Reilly again,²⁷⁸

The message that an artist communicates is not necessarily one which enriches the inner life of the beholder or, indeed, which conduces to his flourishing as a human being. It can happen that art poisons

²⁷⁵ William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*, 1, *Poetry Foundation*; <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43650/auguries-of-innocence>; accessed 22 August, 2023.

²⁷⁶ Skye Shermin, ‘Tracey Emin’s *My Bed*: a violent mess of sex and death’ *The Guardian*, 2017.

²⁷⁷ Kevin O’Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception*, pg., 92.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pg., 96.

the inner man, contributes to a distortion of his perception of reality and, in so doing, undermines the conditions of his flourishing. Art actualizes its negative potential when in particular it subverts moral values and promotes agnosticism or atheism. When it exercises its power over lives in this way, it can deflect them from answering the call to ultimate beauty which is at the heart of every human existence.

A work of art can portray an inadequacy or deprivation which signals a demand for another way, or a different world. Gabriel Marcel suggests that works like those of Pablo Picasso display a perverseness and a ‘profound need’ for a different vision of life.²⁷⁹ A work of art may produce a negative experience, as intended by *My Bed*.



10. *My Bed*

Kitty Jackson describes the work as a ‘raw autobiography.’²⁸⁰ Emin allows the viewer full existential participation in her episode of depression. She could have written a diary entry or described her experience in prose. Yet, neither would be more profound or convey the sense of hopelessness and despair as this ready-made installation piece. For Emin, the experience raised serious existential questions. Lucia Ward thinks the piece is ‘a form of

²⁷⁹ Gabriel Marcel, *Problematic Man*, trans. Brian Thompson (New York, 1967), pgs. 17-19: ‘Everything is as if art, in a Picasso for example, came to manifest... the deformed and as it were unrecognizable image which the inner mirror reflects to us. For it is difficult seriously to admit that this deformation be obtained arbitrarily, that it be but the product of a deliberate and perverse activity, or merely of what is sometimes called the “ludic” consciousness... it is far more plausible to admit that we are in the presence of profound need, which is that of objectifying what I will designate by a term purposefully vague, namely, existential modalities which are situate below the level of day to day consciousness.’

²⁸⁰ Kitty Jackson, ‘Symbolism in Art: Tracey Emin’s Beds,’ *Art Dependence Magazine*, 2008.

confession.²⁸¹ Emin found a cathartic experience.²⁸² Into this deeply existential moment, the viewer is invited. The piece speaks: This is *not* what life and relationships are to be. This is painful, and this kind of psychosomatic suffering does not promote human flourishing. This world picture is to be rejected, and the viewer should strive to avoid a similar episode in his or her own life. Through Emin's work, empathy and a shared feeling of despair are to be exchanged between artist and viewer.

Taylor pointed toward this when he discusses the second condition of life, which he termed exile (Taylor, 2007, pg. 6). This condition can have a negative effect in that the condition of fullness is elusive or seemingly out of reach. The most terrible aspect of exile is that a person can lose a sense of where fullness can even be found or in what it could consist. A sense of melancholy can overtake a person due to his or her experiences. Emin's piece arguably captures a moment in what Taylor describes as exile.

4 The Necessity of Contemplation of a Work of Art

The designation of an object as a 'work of art' functions as a genre. In literature, genre is a contract, an agreement, between the author and reader as to the rules for how to read and interpret the work. Poetry requires the reader to understand similes ('My mistress'

²⁸¹ Lucia Ward, 'My Bed - Tracey Emin' *Art Analysis*, 2007.

²⁸² In an interview with Julian Schnabel, (2006) Emin confesses, 'I had a kind of mini nervous breakdown in my very small flat and didn't get out of bed for four days. And when I did finally get out of bed, I was so thirsty I made my way to the kitchen crawling along the floor. My flat was in a real mess - everything everywhere, dirty washing, filthy cabinets, the bathroom really dirty, everything in a really bad state. I crawled across the floor, pulled myself up on the sink to get some water, and made my way back to my bedroom, and as I did I looked at my bedroom and thought, 'Oh, my God. What if I'd died and they found me here?' And then I thought, 'What if here wasn't here? What if I took out this bed--with all its detritus, with all the bottles, the shitty sheets, the vomit stains, the used condoms, the dirty underwear, the old newspapers--what if I took all of that out of this bedroom and placed it into a white space? How would it look then?' And at that moment I saw it, and it looked fucking brilliant. And I thought, this wouldn't be the worst place for me to die; this is a beautiful place that's kept me alive. And then I took everything out of my bedroom and made it into an installation. And when I put it into the white space, for some people it became quite shocking. But I just thought it looked like a damsel in distress, like a woman fainting or something, needing to be helped. *Interview* June 2006 p. 102-109; <https://www.lehmannmaupin.com/attachment/en/5b363dcb6aa72c840f8e552f/News/5b364ddda09a72437d8ba45e>; accessed 20 September, 2021.

eyes are nothing like the sun'²⁸³), metaphors ('Beauty is truth, truth beauty'²⁸⁴), figures of speech ('Everybody's got a hungry heart'²⁸⁵), etc. The reader must think in pictures to get a sense of the work and to interpret it. The designation 'work of art' has a similar function, as it provides the viewer with the rules for viewing and interpreting the work. Noël Carroll observes, 'Identifying whether something should be classified as art or not is crucial to ascertaining how we should respond to it. Should we attempt to interpret it? Should we explore it for aesthetic properties? Should we try to fathom its design?'²⁸⁶ Thus, the work is intended to be *contemplated*. Whether the viewer judges the work to be good or bad art, or not art at all, is secondary. The intention of the artist is for the work be contemplated in order to be interpreted. Art requires patience and contemplation. Rick Rubin writes (Rubin, 2023, pgs. 112, 114),

The viewer must listen to the work. Critical minds can interfere with the viewer's hearing. Often the viewer's conversation with the work is obstructed by taking notes regarding what we agree or disagree with, what we like or dislike. Formulating opinions, preparing a response, or attacking the work is not listening to the work. Listening is suspending our initial reflexive response. The rewards of true contemplation are great...If we can go beyond our reflexive response, we may find there something beneath that resonates with us or helps our understanding... Regardless of the type of art you are making, listening opens possibilities. It allows us to see a bigger world.

Wolterstorff stresses the necessity of contemplation (Wolterstorff, 1980, pg. 25). An artist characteristically creates their work of art precisely so that it be contemplated. Even if the artist has several 'potential uses' in mind, and these may be 'ordered in a certain priority.' For example, the architect may intend his building first for family living and also as an object of contemplation. However, Wolterstorff argues that when it comes to 'high art', works of art are 'almost exclusively intended...for contemplation.' In fact, the artist puts forward the works for the 'narrow' use of perceptual contemplation. '[I]ndeed, almost all art *is* art for

²⁸³ William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 130," *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, The Project Gutenberg Shakespeare Team, ebook #1041, released 1 September, 1997; <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1041/pg1041-images.html>; accessed 22 November, 2023.

²⁸⁴ John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Poetry Foundation; <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44477/ode-on-a-grecian-urn>; accessed 22 November, 2023.

²⁸⁵ Bruce Springsteen, "Hungry Heart," Side 2, track number 1, from the album, *The River*, Columbia Records, 1980.

²⁸⁶ Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction*, (London: Routledge, 1999), pg., 208.

contemplation.’ What matters is the condition of the heart of the viewer and the level of openness of the viewer to be able to receive from the work.²⁸⁷

Wolterstorff cites Roger Sessions, who writes,²⁸⁸

To listen implies rather a real participation, a real response, a real sharing in the work of the composer and of the performer, and a greater or less degree of awareness of the individual and the specific sense of the music performed.

While Wolterstorff and Sessions are referring specifically to music, the principle and practice of contemplation as participation applies to all the fine arts. Nathan Scott describes it thus,²⁸⁹

The poet [artist], that is to say, explores and consolidates a given experience in his poem, and what we are given is not a set of paraphrasable abstractions but the unity of the experience itself - in which we can share, if we are willing to engage in the kind of strenuous imaginative prehension demanded by the special sort of object that a poem is.

The viewer or listener must listen to the interiority of the work, which requires their consent to the work.

Within the cycle of receptivity, the interpretation of art can take place over a period of time. The viewer, or participant, may revisit the work many times, perhaps even over many years. Aidan Nichols describes it this way, ‘No artwork can be taken in at a single glance. It must be lived with, and in the living, will show a multitude of faces, and an unlimited power to illuminate our experience’ (Nichols, 1980, pg. 94). O’Reilly affirms this when he writes (O’Reilly, 2007, pg. 36),

²⁸⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art In Action*, pg. 25. According to Wolterstorff, to be able to devote the necessary intellectual and emotional energies to the contemplation of works of art, special *spaces* are required: concert halls, art galleries, theaters and reading rooms. These are required if a listener, or viewer, is to *participate* in the work. These venues became the loci of the participation in works of art in the nineteenth century. They provided *public* spaces for works of art. While this may be the case, Wolterstorff’s larger point is that *some* space is necessary for the act of contemplation. He insists that ‘special physical conditions are required’ if a viewer or listener is to achieve the proper frame of mind and heart in order to enter into the work of art, and truly receive from the work itself. These spaces can be private spaces within the home, as well. For the appreciation and contemplation of art, ‘special separated rooms and buildings are beside the point. What matters is the condition of the viewer or listener.’

²⁸⁸ Roger Sessions, *The Musical Experience of Composer, Performer, Listener* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pgs., 7-8. A longer portion of the citation might be helpful here: ‘By a “listener,” I do not mean the person who simply hears music - who is present when it is performed and who, in a general way, may either enjoy or dislike it, but who is in no sense a real participant in it. To listen implies rather a real participation, a real response, a real sharing in the work of the composer and of the performer, and a greater or less degree of awareness of the individual and the specific sense of the music performed.’ Cited in Wolterstorff, *Art In Action*, pg., 25.

²⁸⁹ Nathan A. Scott Jr, “Maritain and His Role As Aesthetician,” *The Review of Metaphysics* vol. 8, no. 3 (March 1955) pg. 487.

In viewing an aesthetic artifact, consciousness beholds a complex interplay of structure, multiple interrelations of forms which combine into increasingly inclusive forms. The intellect cannot fully comprehend this profound and complex order in a mere instant: it must join and separate, in a series of judgments which predicate of things their reality and categorical richness. Such understanding is only gradually attained.

C.E.M Joad describes the fullness (though without using the term) that comes from the experiencing a work and is anticipating Taylor:²⁹⁰

In the appreciation of music and pictures, we get a momentary and fleeting glimpse of the nature of that reality [of what the artist knows and is showing us] to a full knowledge of which the movement of life is progressing. For that moment, and so long as the glimpse persists, we realize in anticipation and almost, as it were, illicitly, the nature of the end. We are, if we may so put it, for a moment *there*, just as the traveler may obtain a fleeting glimpse of a distant country from an eminence passed on the way, and cease for a moment from his journey to enjoy the view. And since we are for a moment *there*, we experience, while the moment lasts, that sense of liberation from the urge and drive of life, which has been noted as one of the characteristics of aesthetic experience.'

I maintain that Joad accurately echoes Taylor's description of fullness. Fullness is a punctuated moment, a glimpse, which, for a moment, orientates the person *there*, in that transcendent moment. It is important to point out that an experience of fullness through an experience of a work of art, as Joad describes it, does not require repeated engagement. The 'wow!' moment that Taylor mentioned previously²⁹¹ can happen during the initial engagement with the work. Moreover, the 'wow!' moment can also be experienced during any subsequent experience of the work of art.

To summarize to this point, the process of the effects of the work of art upon the viewer explains 1) what can be known from the work; 2) the viewer is being invited into the world of the work; 3) if the work will be accepted by the viewer, or not; 4) the deep interpretations drawn from the work; and 5) how contemplation allows the viewer to hear the work, is to explain how the viewer 'enters in' or *participates* in the work. In this way, the viewer, even for a moment, is there inside the work.

The significance of this process demonstrates how the experience of fullness is received in and through the work. The work offers a world picture which is either accepted or

²⁹⁰ C.E.M. Joad, *Matter, Life and Value* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), Chapter IX, pg. 396.

²⁹¹ See Chapter Three, 2.2 of this dissertation.

rejected by the viewer. If the world picture is accepted, then the viewer learns something from the artist through the work which they did not know previously. The viewer is drawn *into* the work and is given the gift of participation in the intuitive knowledge of the work. The work will have pointed the viewer to something beyond themselves, something transcendent, something of what the actual world could or should be. What the viewer experiences is beyond themselves, beyond normal life, and becomes inspirational and aspirational. Passions are ignited. A desire for something higher and more profound is activated in her own life and experience, and even a reorientation of her loves, will be activated. The viewer, as *imago Dei*, may grasp the realities of the spiritual and physical realms. The viewer may then, through greater cognition and exercise of her will, pursue for herself something of the world picture she has received.

5 Conclusion: Fullness and Beyond

The four aspects covered in this chapter - what can be known from a work of art, world-projection, interpretation and contemplation - combine to explain how the effects of an aesthetic experience of a work of art facilitate an experience of fullness. These facets of what it means to have an aesthetic experience of a work of art are characteristic of the psychosomatic and cognitive responses that Taylor describes as an experience of fullness. Therefore, I hope that I have sufficiently demonstrated that an aesthetic experience of art may thus be a medium for an experience of fullness.

However, that is not where this study intends to conclude. The aim of this study is to take Taylor a step further and attempt to locate a bridge between Taylor's philosophical notion of the experience of fullness and the theological concept of people moving toward the transcendent God through the aesthetic experience of art.

In Chapter Three of this study we heard from those who testified that art is a *locus theologicus*. Testimony was also given that it can be known with a measure of confidence that aesthetic experiences are transcendent. To those voices, we briefly add a few more who speak specifically about the effects of works of art on the viewer, taking the viewer of art beyond fullness and into transcendence.

Aidan Nichols testifies that works of art possess an iconographic character to them. He considers an artwork to have ‘a revelatory power,’²⁹² meaning that the work is a ‘being towards’ that which it is a sign. The image depicted in the work has the capacity to ‘point beyond itself’ while yet remaining a clear picture of what it presents. The work will always present the ‘peculiar knowledge’ of its content, and yet ‘it is in its very nature to lure us on, away from itself.’ Thus, the work of art makes real that which we connect with in the work itself. It is in this way that the work also reveals the artist by ‘placing us in communion with him.’ Nichols holds that what is true of icons in Orthodoxy is true ‘of all art.’ Nichols quotes Paul Evdokimov: ‘The icon is a visible sign of the splendor of invisible presence. The space granted us when we follow the cue of the icon in no sense imprisons anything. Rather, it shares a presence and is hallowed by it. The icon has no existence of its own. It simply guides us to what really is.’²⁹³

Johnston describes the effects that can be experienced when viewing a film (Johnston, 2014, pg. 43),

Viewers find themselves transported to another place or into the presence of another, or even an Other. In the process they explore life’s possibilities and contradictions, testing out solutions and even finding themselves surprised by joy...or sorrow, by love and pain and life itself.

Johnston here uses the language of beyond, implying transcendence. He affirms that a person can encounter ‘an Other’ when viewing a film. I maintain that what Johnston says about films can be extrapolated to all the fine arts.

²⁹² Aidan Nichols, *The Art of God Incarnate* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1980), pgs. 98-99.

²⁹³ Paul Evdokimov, *L’Orthodoxie* (Neuchâtel 1959), pg. 219.

Given the collective testimonies of these authors, I maintain that it can be accepted as true that aesthetic experiences of works of art can enable the artist and the viewer to enter into a richer vision of reality and provide a path to encounter a reality beyond the viewer's own perspective and experience. Therefore, I maintain that these effects of aesthetic experiences of works of art affirm several things. First, it affirms Maritain's theory of art presented in the previous chapter, i.e., the artist, by the very nature of *creative intuition* and the creation of art, longs to transcend, to move beyond the this-worldly only and usher the viewers of the work into a vision of reality-beyond-reality. The authors presented in Chapter Six give us a picture of how works of art affect the viewer. Through an aesthetic experience of works of art, the viewer can share in the artist's subjectivity, as well as realities beyond that. Aesthetic experiences of works of art can take the viewers to the threshold of the divine mysteries, where, as *imago Dei*, they can enter in.

Together these concepts contribute to this dissertation's thesis that works of art can be a theological space and a medium in which a person may encounter or move toward the Transcendent God.

The next chapter will attempt to validate the claims of this thesis through a case study. We will examine Alvin Ailey's American Dance Theater modern ballet titled *Revelations*.

Case Study: *Revelations*, by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

The research question for this dissertation is, ‘Can art be a medium for connection with God?’ The aim of this research project is to examine the connection between theology, art, culture and Christian mission and thus illustrate possible fresh expressions of how the Church can reach a secular generation through art. The previous chapters offered a path to traverse the gap between philosopher Charles Taylor’s philosophical notion of the experience of fullness and the theological concept of how people inhabiting a secular age could move toward the transcendent God through the medium of art. A hope is that this project will highlight the possible significance for artists who are Christian to be active in their vocation of making art as an important component in contemporary Christian mission activity. Previously in this dissertation, the visual arts of painting, sculpture and installation art have been put forward as examples of art as a medium for the experience of fullness. This chapter will explore another art form, modern ballet, to demonstrate how art, and the aesthetic experience of art as articulated by Jacques Maritain, can be a medium for the experience of fullness. Moreover, it is hoped that this case study sufficiently demonstrates how an aesthetic experience of art can go beyond Taylor’s notion of fullness. I maintain that Alvin Ailey’s work can be a *theological* site in which God is present and active. Therefore, through Ailey’s work, a person may encounter or move toward the transcendent God.

1 Introduction: The Story

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater was created by Alvin Ailey in 1960. According to the company profile, it has performed before over 25 million people in 48 states and in 71 countries on six continents, celebrating both the African-American cultural and spiritual

experience and the American modern dance tradition.²⁹⁴ Important Christian themes are woven into the very fabric of Ailey's work, at times explicitly and at other times implicitly. Ailey's most prominent themes include the struggle against the pain, the loss and the suffering of African American individuals and communities in the modern, secular world. In Ailey's work, these experiences are often offset by the joy, salvation and hope found in a life lived in communion with the transcendent God.

Ailey's work is at times implicit in the presentation of Christian themes, in that he presents a realistic world picture of life in the immanent frame, though he himself did not use such terminology. Ailey shares with the viewer the realities of the difficulties of life in this world through his own experiences as an African American in the American rural South, as well as in the world of modern dance. He does not always overtly point to Christian spirituality as an answer. However, much of Ailey's work is explicitly evangelistic, pointing the audience to a saving faith of the kind he experienced in southern African American Christian spirituality. Ailey's *oeuvre* leaves little doubt as to where he believes freedom, salvation and hope are found. Ailey's work is, therefore, especially pertinent to a secular viewer seeking something higher and more profound in life within the immanent frame. In each piece, Ailey offers - if only in glimpses - joy, hope, triumph and celebration.

The first section of this chapter will examine two of Ailey's pieces that convey an answer to fullness implicitly through themes found in Christian spirituality. These pieces are *Cry* (1971) and *Memoria* (1979). The second section will focus on *Revelations* (1960), an Ailey work that is more explicit in the presentation of the gospel as experienced within African American spirituality. It offers an answer to the struggles and hardships experienced in the immanent frame.

²⁹⁴ Alvin Ailey American Dance, 'Cry,' AILEYPressroom, <https://pressroom.alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/repertory/cry>; accessed 11 September, 2023.

This dissertation recognizes that interactions with Ailey's work are considerably multi-layered. In *Cry*, Ailey addresses ethnically oriented gender issues by portraying the struggles of African American women. He also addresses racial issues when describing the difficulties he faced as a young African American male growing up in the American South. He further addresses his personal struggle to find a career as a black choreographer in the dance world in the 1960s. Ailey's work could serve in the current post-colonial discourse and the legacy of slavery and racial issues happening in North America and the United Kingdom today. A question could be posed, 'How can non-African Americans in the audience relate to the experiences of this particular marginalized social group?' Any interpreter of Ailey's work must be careful not to overly universalize his message at the expense of the surface interpretation he offers regarding the African American experience. Fortunately, Ailey provides some help for interpretation, especially in *Revelations*, as he points the viewer or interpreter to Christian spirituality and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Ailey speaks on many levels to many issues within contemporary cultural discourse; however, his work is highlighted here as an example of art as a *theological* site in which God is present and active. It is hoped that, in experiencing Ailey's work, a viewer can resonate with Ailey's story and, in hearing his story, may hear their own. Therefore, I maintain that Ailey's work can be a medium for the experience of fullness, and beyond that, a person may encounter, or move toward, the transcendent God.

A second question that may arise is whether or not Ailey provides an adequate response to Taylor. Can Ailey be called upon to provide an answer to Taylor's notion of fullness? Taylor addresses his thesis to the North Atlantic world (Taylor, 2007, pg. 1), by which he means Europe and North America. It is this region that Taylor suggests is the most influenced by secularization. But did the African American cultural experience succumb to secularization in the same way, and to the same degree, as the other subcultures of North

Atlantic peoples? Did African American culture affirm the retreat of the transcendent from the public square and/or a decline of faith and/or practice, or the death of Christendom, as did other cultures?²⁹⁵ These three aspects may not generally characterize African American culture, yet this need not disqualify Ailey and his presentation of the world. As previously mentioned in Chapter One of this study, a main feature of Taylor's secularization thesis is Secularity 3. The point of Secularity 3 is that there no longer exists a default belief or narrative to which the entire culture subscribes. All faiths and ideologies are welcome yet contestable. Secularity 3 is not godless; rather it is up for grabs as a constellation of possible beliefs exists.²⁹⁶ Therefore, Ailey is welcome at the table in the discourse, even if he heralds from a less secularized subculture.

A third question might be, 'Does African American Christian spirituality provide a complete answer to the situation of secularization?' This does not need to be the case. The Christian answer need not be, '*Only* African American Christianity provides an answer.' Neither does the answer need to be narrowed so that any particular form of Protestantism, Orthodox, or Roman Catholic spirituality alone provides an answer. While Ailey may be from a particular Baptist tradition practised in his place of origin of Texas, he can offer, implicitly and explicitly, an answer for the experience of fullness and transcendence, as his personal experience was within orthodox (with a small 'o') Christianity.

²⁹⁵ See Francisco Lombo de Léon and Bart van Leeuwen, "Charles Taylor on Secularization," *Ethical Perspectives*, January 2003, 'These three, 1) the retreat of the transcendent from the public square and/or 2) a decline of faith and/or practice 3) the death of Christendom, i.e., a whole civilization or society which is impregnated in Christianity, are recognized as the fundamental aspects of secularization theory. However, Taylor's project in *A Secular Age* is to explore how these aspects arose, and what caused these to develop in the first place. In an interview (2003) Taylor gave this answer, "Well, I am interested in a third phenomenon, without being disinterested in either of these which is: how do we have construals of our world that develop and become institutionalized where it becomes very difficult to think of the transcendent, to accept the transcendent, to talk about the transcendent?"

²⁹⁶ Taylor described this phenomenon as the *Nova Effect*, which was not addressed in this study. See especially *A Secular Age* pages 300-321.

2 The Implicit Gospel: ‘Cry’ and ‘Memoria’

The first piece this study will consider is the ballet *Cry* (1971). *Cry* is a solo piece that Ailey created as a tribute to his mother. It was originally performed by his dance partner, Judith Jamison. The piece is in three sections.²⁹⁷ The female soloist appears wearing a white leotard and a long ruffled skirt. She represents all black women. Nadine Matthews of *Dance Magazine* notes that a large white cloth, or shawl, several feet in length, is also part of the costume. The material is employed in various ways. It is wrapped around the head, used as a shawl, or held out as if to offer it to the audience. The most poignant use is a ‘makeshift crown,’ which is intended to honour Black womanhood.²⁹⁸ Female soloist Judith Jamison said of the shawl, ‘[T]hat cloth is literally the weight of the world.’ It was Ailey’s statement about ‘[H]ow much we are carrying as Black women,’ and ‘How much we are celebrated or not celebrated as queens.’²⁹⁹ The piece also depicts their African origins, the trials and tribulations they have endured, and their joyful triumphs over those hardships. Through the piece, the audience is carried along on ‘a journey of bitter sorrow, brutal hardship’ that climaxes in the experience of ‘ecstatic joy.’³⁰⁰ According to Jamison, the work depicts all women who have suffered the hardships of slavery, the pain of losing loved ones and endured pains and tribulations, yet ‘found her way and triumphed.’ Ailey dedicated the piece to ‘all Black women everywhere - especially our mothers.’³⁰¹ The *New York Observer* described the piece as ‘...emotional and spiritual transcendence.’³⁰² The *California Literary Review* wrote,

²⁹⁷ The first is section set to Alice Coltrane’s “Something about John Coltrane.” The second section follows singer Laura Nyro’s “Been on a Train” and the last set is performed by the African American ensemble Voices of East Harlem singing “Right On, Be Free.”

²⁹⁸ Nadine Matthews, “Alvin Ailey’s Jacqueline Green in ‘Cry,’” *Dance Magazine*, 13 May, 2021; <https://www.dancemagazine.com/friday-film-break/alvin-ailey-cry/>; accessed December 2023.

²⁹⁹ Judith Jamison, “Celebrating 50 Years of Alvin Ailey’s *Cry*,” *Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tw6vzE4WfLA>; accessed December, 2023.

³⁰⁰ Alvin Ailey American Dance, ‘Cry,’ AILEYPressroom, <https://pressroom.alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/repertory/cry>; accessed 11 September, 2023.

³⁰¹ Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, ‘Cry,’ *Repertory*; <https://www.alvinailey.org/performances/repertory/cry>; accessed 11 September, 2023.

³⁰² Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, *Cry*; https://s3.amazonaws.com/cms.ipressroom.com/292/files/202210/Cry+Info+Sheet_102419Final.pdf. Other

‘When a single dancer takes on the demanding role, *Cry* tells a story of growth and transcendence, of despair turned to strength.’³⁰³ While the work was intended to portray the experiences of African American women, Nadine Matthews notes that the ‘elements of the pain, frustration, inspiration, and, yes, moments of jubilation dramatized in *Cry* easily resonate with women of all backgrounds.’

Using the previous chapter as a template - the effect of the work on the viewer - it can be demonstrated how *Cry* validates the theories of Maritain, Wolterstorff, and Danto, et. al., how it offers an experience of fullness to its audiences, and how *Cry* implicitly presents the Gospel of Jesus Christ.



11. *Cry*

What is known through the work? The subjectivity of the artist is revealed. The love and respect that Ailey has for African American women shines through. He views them as heroic figures who labour under the hardships of the modern world, while trying to provide a

reviews from this site include: ‘...most of all, the piece is probably the closest dance has ever come to a shout - or cry - of pure anger, pain and exultation.’ *The New York Times*; ‘In three sections, *Cry* explores physical hardship, emotional suffering and — to the Voices of East Harlem’s “Right On Be Free” — boundless joy. Structurally, it builds to an emphatic release...’ *The New York Times*; ‘...the first-night audience... applauded and cheered it for nearly 10 minutes.’ *The New York Times*. accessed 11 September, 2023.

³⁰³ Hanna Oldsman, ‘Dance Review: Alvin Ailey Offers Anointed, The Hunt, Cry and Revelations, *California Literary Review*, 30 October, 2022’; <https://calitreview.com/dance-review-alvin-ailey-offers-anointed-the-hunt-cry-and-revelations/>; accessed 11 September, 2023.

better life for their loved ones. Ailey's love for his own mother provides a paradigm for others in the African American community to do the same. For Ailey, the women of his culture carry the heavy burden of caring for their loved ones.

The attraction of art, according to Rick Rubin in the previous chapter, is that in hearing another's story, we often hear our own. Many women, both African American and those from other backgrounds, may hear their story in *Cry*. There exists a resonance among all women who feel that they are carrying the weight of the world upon their shoulders. Echoes of every female life experiencing the burden of womanhood can be heard from the work. What is projected in the world of the work is true in the world of many women.

What could be in the piece for male audience members? The love and respect Ailey has for women is held out as a paradigm for the male viewers of the work.

But Ailey does not abandon his viewers to the task of bearing their burden. He includes *The Consolation*, the sudden 'joyous turn.' The second section of the piece provides the *eucatastrophe*. The harsh realities of her world are not denied; rather she experiences growth and transcendence, of despair turned to strength through perseverance and the support of the community. She is not alone in her struggle, even if she is alone on stage. Through the piece, the soloist rises from defeat, but the audience is there to support her; we are her community. An implied meaning of the piece is that no one can rise alone, so we, the audience, support her and cheer her on in the struggle.

Yet defeat and hardship are not the last words. Should a viewer accept the piece, then an experience of fullness can be had. A glimpse of the transcendent, of what life could be like, or should be like, is offered. The new world picture can resonate with the female viewer. The joyous ending of the piece alerts her that, as Taylor describes it, there is a place or condition in which life is fuller, richer, deeper, more admirable, more what it should be. Even

the surface interpretation would suggest to the viewer, ‘This could be my world.’ This could portray my rising.

Ailey’s *Cry* is deeply personal, and ‘nearly all of his dances had some basis in a relationship, feeling or event that he experienced.’³⁰⁴ In Maritain’s terminology, Ailey continually drew from the depths of his own subjectivity, i.e., what he knows and has experienced of the world, the things of the world, and even spirituality or God. Ailey then invites the viewers into his world.

Another such work of Ailey’s is *Memoria* (1979). The Alvin Ailey website reveals much about the piece that provides insight for the viewer.³⁰⁵ Ailey created the ballet in response to the death of his friend, Joyce Trisler. He said the piece was dedicated to ‘the joy...the beauty...the creativity...and the wild spirit of my friend.’ *The New York Times* dance critic Anna Kisselgoff wrote, ‘Mr. Ailey has paid Miss Trisler the fine tribute of creating a work that has a universal quality. It is a dance of both exultation and quiet but deep feeling.’

Ailey wanted to honour Trisler’s life and legacy. The two had worked together for many years, with Trisler eventually becoming a leading member of the company and a teacher at the Ailey School. The news of her death shocked Ailey, who, at some deep level, refused to accept her death. While he didn’t cry, or grieve or feel depressed, he was emotionally unable to attend her memorial service. He began work on resolving his emotional state by creating a ballet that would help him work through the healing process. Following the creation of the piece, Ailey embarked on a self-destructive manic-depressive path of drug

³⁰⁴ Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, ‘Cry,’ *Repertory*; <https://www.alvinailey.org/performances/repertory/memoria>; accessed 11 September, 2023.

³⁰⁵ Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, “Surprising Things You May Not Know About Alvin Ailey’s ‘Memoria,’ 27 June, 2023; <https://www.alvinailey.org/blog/surprising-things-you-may-not-know-about-alvin-aileys-memoria>; accessed December, 2023.

use, street-fighting, illicit sexual encounters and multiple arrests. The erratic behaviour eventually led to his being admitted into a mental institution.³⁰⁶

At the beginning of the creating process he was without direction, until he realized what Maritain called the ‘germ’³⁰⁷ of the work would be; it would be Joyce. He writes, ‘that it [*Memoria*] was about Joyce. The connection that audiences had with *Memoria* made the dance a very deep and wrenching experience for me.’³⁰⁸

The ballet’s running time is twenty-six minutes. In the first section of the piece, the lead woman is often isolated even while in the midst of the other dancers on stage. The choreography represents ‘that she’s no longer a part of the world others inhabit,’³⁰⁹ which for Ailey meant the very painful remembrance of the loss of his friend.³¹⁰

In the second section, titled “In Celebration”, the lead female dancer is now dressed in red; grief and the sorrow have run their course, and the woman experiences a joyous and ‘uplifting’ celebration. This is portrayed as she is lifted up by an ensemble of dancers in brightly coloured costumes.



12. *Memoria*

³⁰⁶ Alvin Ailey, *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1995), pgs. 136-146.

³⁰⁷ See 5.2 of this study.

³⁰⁸ Alvin Ailey, *Revelations*, pgs. 136-137.

³⁰⁹ AAADT, “Surprising Things.”

³¹⁰ Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, ‘Cry,’ *Repertory*; <https://www.alvinailey.org/performances/repertory/memoria>; accessed 11 September, 2023.

AAADT concludes the review of *Memoria*, ‘Both the dance and the music build from a mood of sombre yearning to frisky syncopation and finally to a surging, wild melodic joy.’ The New York Times review describes the second section of the piece,³¹¹

‘Memoria’ grows more celebratory, with pageantry that recalls Miss Trisler’s years with Lester Horton in its massed look and highly charged but controlled energy. And then, at last, the stage is filled with joyous, jiving dancers in stage and street clothes. The woman leaps through the crowd and dances as one with them until she is raised above them into the light.

As with *Cry*, we can ask of *Memoria* what its effect is on the viewer. Several answers may be offered. Again, Ailey’s subjectivity is on display. He deeply loved his friend and co-worker, and her passing was deeply troubling for him. He wanted terribly to remember her as the amazing, beautiful person that she was. Moreover, he wanted the world to know Trisler in this way. Therefore, I maintain that the audience is invited to share Ailey’s deep love for his friend. Though the work is part catharsis for Ailey, it is mostly a profound love letter to his friend. In Ailey’s story of his grief and love, the audience may hear their own story. For those who have lost loved ones, *Memoria* is the existential sharing of grief, longing and memory of those we have lost. Even though the loss of his friend was grievous, Ailey still includes a *eucatastrophe*. The woman is celebrated with love, displayed by the joyous energy of the dance. She tragically left this world too soon, yet she lives on in the creativity, beauty and vibrancy of the dance. She is like the woman in the Gospel of Mark who anointed the feet of Jesus: ‘I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her’ (Mark 14:9).

I maintain that almost every viewer can accept this picture of the world. The surface interpretation performs its work as the viewer can resonate with the meaning of *Memoria*. An experience of fullness can be had, one that points the viewer to a higher and profound reality: the reality of a life well-lived, a rich life in which the miraculous gift of love was shared over many, many years, and strong, resilient friendship that carries a person through the most

³¹¹ Jennifer Dunning, “Dance: Ailey’s *Memoria*,” *The New York Times*, Section 1, pg., 78.

difficult of times. If this is so, the piece may even evoke questions of the possibility of a deeper meaning of life and the possibility of life beyond this life. The moment of imperfect happiness may evoke questions of perfect happiness.

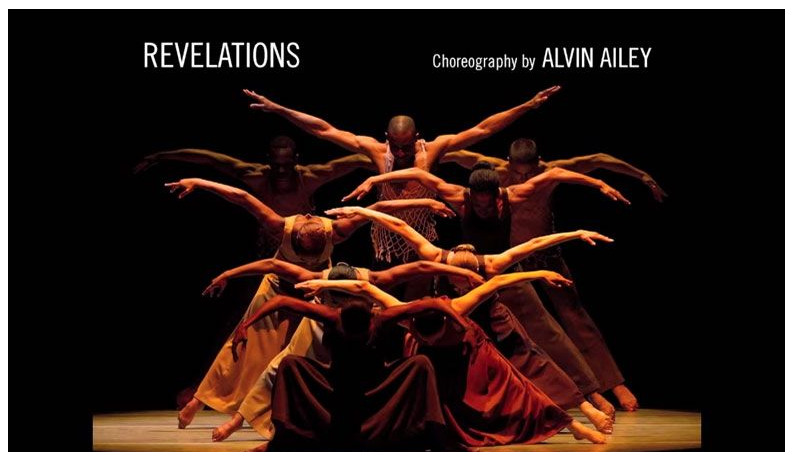
A deeper interpretation may be found by others who have yet to complete the grieving process for a lost loved one. Perhaps for some, the goodbye is not yet celebratory. Too much pain remains. For such a viewer who needs to accept the world of the work, a moment of fullness can be experienced as well. A word from the work, implicitly, is that life can be lived in a higher register, one which is worthwhile and fully realized here and now yet carries with it that celebration, not defeat, is the final word. This experience may move the viewer to seek out a life of such meaning and fullness. Yet in either case the viewer is quite likely to be moved deeply in the heart by experiencing this punctuated moment of ordinary life.

These two pieces provide examples of how Ailey, through his *oeuvre*, engages important questions and experiences of his own life. Yet these are the very same experiences and questions shared by people in a secular age. These experiences and questions include the problem of pain and suffering, the struggle against injustices, loss and hardship, and the sorrows and tribulations that all people share. These works by Ailey implicitly suggest answers to the questions and problems people face in the modern world. The situations portrayed in the work are not, in some sense, unique to the African American culture. These answers cohere with Taylor's suggestion that life can be worth living, meaningful and fuller than currently experienced, and that there exists a higher and more profound way to live. Each piece provides a *eucatastrophe*, suggesting that within the immanent frame, defeat and suffering are not the last words. Celebration is. Each piece provides punctuated moments of the experience of fullness, i.e., experiences or conditions which orientate a person toward hope, joy, strength, meaning and triumph in the midst of such a world of struggle and pain.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on how Ailey offers, through his most famous and important work, *Revelations*, an aesthetic and explicitly theological answer to Taylor's philosophical questions regarding the quest for the good life or the search for fullness. *Revelations* portrays through dance a specifically Christian spirituality as experienced in salvation, hope, triumph, transcendence, church, and God. *Revelations* can carry the philosophical and metaphysical load that Taylor suggests burdens inhabitants of a secular age.

3 The Explicit Gospel: *Revelations*

3.1 What Does 'Revelations' Communicate?



13. *Revelations*

What is Ailey trying to communicate through *Revelations*? The work was created in 1960, and according to the **Ailey**PRESSROOM - the official AAADT website - the piece has 'enraptured' audiences all over the world. It is Ailey's signature work, which he choreographed when he was just 29 years old. He took inspiration from childhood memories of his attendance at Mount Olive Baptist Church in Rogers, Texas, which he described as 'sometimes sorrowful, sometimes jubilant, but always hopeful.' *Revelations* thus depicts

Ailey's experience of southern African American Christian spirituality as it displays the journey from struggle to surrender to salvation. This destination of hope is Ailey's primary goal for his work.

He described the use of his own life memories and experiences as 'blood memory,' meaning events and experiences that are 'remembered in the body' and, in that way, passed down to later generations through the lived experience of the community.³¹²

Set to a suite of traditional spirituals, *Revelations* explores the emotional spectrum of the human condition, from the deepest of grief to the holiest joy. A classic tribute to the resolve and determination of a people, the ballet has been seen by more people around the world than any other modern work.³¹³

Here, Ailey is more explicit. He seeks to share with his audience *religious* and *spiritual* experiences from his life. He invites the audience and the viewer to participate in the spectrum of emotions that all human beings in a secular age share, yet here, he offers a religious answer to that common plight. Ailey also offers a select way of seeing and understanding the world, as Maritain suggests all artists do. Thomas F. DeFrantz describes the work,³¹⁴

Designed to suggest a chronological spectrum of black religious music from the sorrow songs to gospel rock, *Revelations* mapped rural southern spirituality on to the concert stage.

According to DeFrantz, the spirituals or 'sorrow songs,' were creations of nineteenth-century African American folk culture and sung in order to 'release a central passion for freedom subversively contained in simple texts of Bible stories.'³¹⁵ The Biblical narrative is offered as a counter to the suffering within the African American context. The interpretation of the piece offers a word to the culture at large of the plight and the continued struggle of the contemporary African American community. At another level, this 'liberating' message may

³¹² Kari Lindquist, 'Alvin Ailey's Revelations: An Experience Worth Repeating,' *UNC College of Arts and Sciences, Music*, 13 June, 2022; <https://music.unc.edu/2022/06/13/alvin-aileys-revelations-an-experience-worth-repeating/>; accessed 5 September, 2023.

³¹³ Alvin Ailey American Dance, **AILEY**Pressroom, *Revelations*; <https://pressroom.alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/repertory/revelations>; accessed 4 September, 2023.

³¹⁴ Thomas F. DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pg. 3.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. 3.

also be an accusation against the dominant cultural narratives that have historically contributed to the trauma of African American Christians. A deep interpretation - seeing meaning in the work that is beyond the intention of the artist but yet within the parameters set by the surface interpretation³¹⁶ - may be derived from the work. Many in the audience of other ethnicities will have no personal experience of the kind of suffering Ailey depicts. Certainly, not all in the audience share Ailey's Texas Baptist history, or the African American experience. So, what does Ailey offer them? This being the case, *Revelations* presents to individual modern secular viewers, even those without Ailey's history, a transcendent answer to the suffering, malaise, despair, meaninglessness, or fragilization felt by those who inhabit the immanent frame. That answer is Christianity and Christian spirituality.

The medium is ballet, so that the viewer must see and feel the articulation of the artist's communication. The music chosen for the various pieces and the use of props and costumes certainly contribute to the communication. However, what empowers the communication and is the primary vehicle for interpretation is the dancer's bodies in movement. It is the movement of the dancers that brings the feelings of the dancers and the *metaphor* - the concept the dancer is trying to communicate - to life. It is the beauty of the dancer's movements that communicates the possibilities of the meanings.³¹⁷ So while Ailey is not specifically addressing Taylor's question of fullness, or even life in a secular age - Ailey and Taylor were never conversant with each other - the primary metaphor for Ailey's work is

³¹⁶ See chapter 6.3 of this study.

³¹⁷ Einav Katan-Schmid, 'Dancing Metaphors': Creative Thinking Within Bodily Movements, *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics*, vol. 9, 2017. The author writes, 'Within dancing metaphors, the consciousness of movement is not a consciousness about movement as an external outlook on what the dancer has done and then is imagining what can be done further. Rather, there is an immediacy of seeing the movement as possibilities of the body from within. Somatic feelings are interlocked with how and where those feelings can be developed. Thus, feelings are integral to the image of the dance. What appears to be a precise line follows precise feeling extending the muscles' (287). In the Abstract she writes, 'movement capacities in dance as metaphorical interplays, which bring the score of the dance to life.' In other words, in *dance* it is the *movement* that is primary. The movement must convey the concept, or 'metaphor.'

freedom, redemption, and salvation. Ailey here explicitly points his audience to something higher and more profound than any current state of suffering and thus speaks to Taylor's concerns through that very metaphor.

The music includes 'true spirituals' with their sustained melodies, ring-shouts, song-sermons, gospel songs and holy blues - songs of trouble, of love, of deliverance.³¹⁸ Chuck Schultz calls the performance 'A gospel, allegorical presentation of African American heritage.'³¹⁹ A typical evening at an AAADT production includes two or three ballets, but *Revelations* is always performed last and is thus presented as the climactic performance. Through this particular line-up, Ailey's message is that whatever has come previously during the concert certainly has meaning, but the last word is the gospel. The last word of the performance was intended to point the audience toward an aspect of life as it could be: freedom, redemption, salvation, and hope. The audience is to see, perhaps to catch only a glimpse in a punctuated moment, of Ailey's version of the world as he understood it. Ailey created *Revelations* long before his bout with drug use and self-destruction. So the fact that *Revelations* is always the last piece performed suggests that Ailey's message to the audience is that faith and the Christian spirituality of his upbringing is 'an answer' along whatever path on which a person may find themselves. Thus, through this sequence of performances, regardless of which ballets are chosen to be presented first or second, through *Revelations*, Ailey explicitly suggests to his audience that the way to a life worth living was through Christian spirituality.

³¹⁸ Notes from the Ailey Souvenir Program, Kaufman Concert Hall YM-YWHA performance, 31 January, 1960, found in Thomas F. DeFrantz, *Dancing Revelations: Alvin Ailey's Embodiment of African American Culture*, pg. 3.

³¹⁹ Chuck Schultz, 'Audience Review: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre's "Revelations Through the Decades," *The Dance Enthusiast: A Moving Parts Project*, <https://www.dance-enthusiast.com/get-involved/reviews/view/Alvin-Ailey-American-Dance-Theaters-Revelations-Through-The-Decades-December-2-31-2020>; accessed 3 September, 2023.

The viewers are invited to participate in a moving and captivating journey of spirituality and faith.³²⁰ *Revelations* presents a story of struggle, salvation and celebration in three sections, in order of performance: 'Pilgrim of Sorrow,' 'Take Me to the Water,' 'Move, Members, Move.' Regarding the work, Ailey says,³²¹

I did it chronologically, leading off with the opening part of *Revelations*, which was...about trying to get up out of the ground. The costumes and the set would be colored brown, an earth color, for coming out of the earth, for going into the earth. The second part was something that was very close to me – the baptismal, the purification rite. Its colors would be white and pale blue. Then there would be the section surrounding the gospel church, the holy rollers and all the church happiness. Its colors would be earth tones, yellow and black.

What does Ailey want his audience to see? Ailey takes the viewer on a journey of spiritual searching, struggle and resolution, akin to what Taylor describes as the quest for the good life. This particular journey ends in life in the Church and communion with the transcendent God of Christianity. Ramona Harper captures the transcendence of the work,³²²

If dance can be considered a form of prayer that has the capacity to touch, to heal, and to raise the human spirit, then the stunning opening night performance of the esteemed Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at the Kennedy Center was a spiritually riveting meditation through movement. It began with a haunting plea for change that evolved to a hopeful shout of joyful praise. And its message was right on time.

Notice Harper's reaction: the dance moved her, even as prayer would; the art of dance, and this performance in particular, has the capacity to 'touch, heal and raise the human spirit.'

The performance was 'spiritually riveting.' Harper experienced the sacramental nature of the

³²⁰ Music:

PILGRIM OF SORROW

I Been 'Buked - Music arranged by Hall Johnson**

Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel - Music arranged by James Miller+

Fix Me, Jesus - Music arranged by Hall Johnson**

TAKE ME TO THE WATER

Processional/Honor, Honor - Music adapted and arranged by Howard A. Roberts

Wade in the Water - Music adapted and arranged by Howard A. Roberts

"Wade in the Water" sequence by Ella Jenkins / "A Man Went Down to the River" is an original composition by Ella Jenkins

I Wanna Be Ready - Music arranged by James Miller+

MOVE, MEMBERS, MOVE

Sinner Man - Music adapted and arranged by Howard A. Roberts

The Day is Past and Gone - Music arranged by Howard A. Roberts and Brother John Sellers

You May Run On - Music arranged by Howard A. Roberts and Brother John Sellers

Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham - Music adapted and arranged by Howard A. Roberts

³²¹ Alvin Ailey, *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1995), pg. 98.

³²² Ramona Harper, 'Review: Alvin Ailey Dance Theater at the Kennedy Center,' 8 February, 2018, *DC Theater Arts: Your Next Theater Destination*; <https://dctheaterarts.org/2018/02/08/review-alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater-kennedy-center-2/>; accessed 4 September, 2023.

work; it was as if a ‘divine presence’ was imparted.³²³ Her experience of the dance provided her with something of a ‘revelatory event.’ A ‘moment of communion’ transpired from the work to her, the viewer, through the mediation of signs, i.e., the dance itself.³²⁴ The performance was a ‘theological text’ which pointed Harper to something higher and more profound.³²⁵

The universality of the message of redemption and salvation forms the template for *Revelations*, and it is precisely this conviction that can be felt, identified, and embraced by audiences all over the world.³²⁶ As Ailey himself says, ‘The tune and textures of the spirituals speak to everyone.’³²⁷ In other words, *Revelations* speaks to what Taylor calls the *ineradicable bent* in all human hearts.

These effects are possible because the work comes from deep within Ailey himself. The faculty of *poetry* within Ailey produced his poetic, or creative intuition. Poetry is a human thing,³²⁸ yet it was poetry that enabled Ailey to reach into the spiritual, as well the physical, realities of things of the world, in order to manifest these in his work. As Maritain has said above, poetry is the human capability to reach into the heavens and, more importantly, communicate that knowledge through a work (Maritain, 2021, pg. 217), thus providing an experience of fullness. Poetry gave birth to *poetic* or *creative* intuition, which allowed Ailey to reach deeply into his soul and bring out a work which reflected his subjectivity, i.e., his feelings and experiences.

Ailey’s poetic intuition was not limited to the choreography. The music is also the ‘coming together’ of Ailey’s life and ideas.³²⁹ This is something that Ailey also required of

³²³ James McCollough, “How Art Contributes to Faith,” pg. 3.

³²⁴ Nichols, *The Art of God Incarnate*, pg., 113.

³²⁵ Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*, pg., 154.

³²⁶ Ramona Harper, ‘Review: Alvin Ailey Dance Theater at the Kennedy Center.’

³²⁷ Alvin Ailey, *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey*, pg., 101.

³²⁸ Raïssa Maritain, *Poetry and Mysticism*, pg., 6

³²⁹ Alvin Ailey, *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey*, pg., 101: ‘I’m not afraid to say there’s not one song in *Revelations* that doesn’t hold the listeners’ interest. The songs are poetic, and the rhythm that grows out of them is black rhythm. The songs are truthful and a real coming together of music and ideas through dance. The

all his dancers who perform the work. For him, there is an artistic difference between technique and ‘insight.’ The dancers must project their personality by giving themselves wholly to the dance. They must also tap into their own poetic intuition. In this way, a dancer can truly express the work and connect with the audience. In this way, the audience can share in the experience of the piece through the embodiment of the communication of the artist’s ideas and concepts.³³⁰ Technical prowess is not sufficient to bring out the ‘moment of communion’ from the work. Ailey was adamant about this; he wanted his audience to *feel*, as much as possible, the African American experience in its breadth of struggle, salvation and celebration, as well as the universal longing for freedom and salvation. Ailey displayed in his work what McCollough describes as ‘the ecstatic draw of beauty’, which would provide ‘analogies between the experience of the world [or the dance] and the existence of God.’³³¹ George Faison highlights Ailey’s importance in bringing African American choreography and dance into the mainstream dance world. That is what made Ailey’s work so special - it resonated with all audiences everywhere.³³²

songs also represent a coming together of many things in my head - of youthful energy and enthusiasm, of my concern about projecting the black image properly. They reflect my own feelings about being pressed into the ground of Texas; they re-create the music I heard from the ladies in Texas who sold apples while singing spirituals, memories of songs my mother would hum around the house, and the songs I sang in junior high. We would sing “Rocka My Soul” in junior high school glee club. The songs in *Revelations* are all of those things. And I think they have meant a lot to audiences everywhere.’

³³⁰ Ibid., pg. 126: ‘Today’s kids are very technical. They can do eighteen pirouettes on a dime and get their leg way above their head and hold it there. But the insight is not the same: It’s not as giving, not as warm. They need to give themselves to the dance, to project themselves from the inside out. That’s what we get after them about. We coach and direct to bring out personalities. We want them to be capable of acting out various parts, to become the different individuals in each ballet. That’s where personality comes in... I saw that happen with Judy; she didn’t come on in extraordinary way with audiences until *Cry*. Her shyness hurt her, but with *Cry* she became herself. Once she found this contact, this release, she poured herself into everybody who came to see her perform. She grew to another level.’

³³¹ James McCollough, “How Art Contributes to Faith,” pg., 2.

³³² Alvin Ailey, *Revelations: The Autobiography of Alvin Ailey*, pgs., 154-155: ‘When we begin to think of Alvin in a historical context, we must always remember that there has always been a debate about the artistic accomplishment of black choreographers and black dancers. They’ve been viewed as existing outside the mainstream modern dance. We discovered this when we began to develop an American Dance Festival program. We were interested in doing a script for a possible documentary. In the process of pulling our facts together, we discovered not only did white dancers but black dancers who did not know the scope of African-American participation in the history of dance. When you look at Alvin’s company souvenir booklet and see the repertoire from 1958 to 1989 it’s astounding. It’s the most extraordinary repertoire in the whole history of dance. There’s something for everyone.’

Revelations is divided into three sections, with each section including several dances representing different aspects of Ailey's experiences as a young boy in Baptist worship. The first section is 'Pilgrim of Sorrow', in which the dancers portray a people who hope for redemption or salvation in the midst of life's pain and difficulties. The focal movements are dancers reaching upward toward heaven but then are pulled back to earth. The second section, 'Take Me to the Water', depicts Ailey's own baptism, which took place in a pond behind his church. Props are creatively employed, along with movements suggesting rippling water. The third section, 'Move, Members, Move,' begins as a church congregation gathers to worship. The congregants gather in conversations, fan themselves due to the heat of the hot day and then celebrate the hope of salvation.

Church life was always important for Ailey. He recalls an experience when he was about nine years old when he witnessed a baptism. Ailey included the scene in *Wade in the Water* and *I've Been 'Buked*.³³³ Those church services were filled with 'profound feeling, with faith, hope, joy and sometimes sadness,' as 'the choirs, congregations, deacons, preachers and ushers would sing black spirituals and gospel songs.' It was this overpowering energy and sense of something higher - something transcendent - which Ailey 'tried to put all of that feeling into *Revelations*.'³³⁴

3.2 *Pilgrim of Sorrow*

'Pilgrim of Sorrow' introduces the struggle that precipitates the journey towards spiritual freedom.³³⁵ It includes three pieces: *I Been 'Buked*, *Didn't the Lord Deliver Daniel*,

³³³ Ibid., pg. 18: 'At a church in Cameron, when I was about nine, I watched a procession of people, all in white, going down to a lake. The minister was baptizing everybody as the choir sang "Wade in the Water." After baptism we went in church where the minister's wife was singing a soulful version of "I've Been 'Buked, I've Been Scorned." The ladies had fans that they fluttered while talking and singing. All of this is in my ballet *Revelations*.'

³³⁴ Ibid., pg. 97.

³³⁵ Michelle Ma, 'Review of Alvin Ailey's *Revelations* Dance: A Sensational Work That Encapsulates African American tenacity and the Human Spirit,' *Odyssey*, 30 September, 2020; <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/alvin-ailey-revelations-review>; accessed 4 September, 2023.

and *Fix Me, Jesus*. The section trades on the allusion to an atmosphere of oppression in the South and the search for a deliverance through spirituality.³³⁶ The most prominent feature of the piece is the outstretched arms of the dancers. The dancers move as a group and in unison, symbolizing a community that hopes for a better future. The dancers reach up and out, conveying the need to grasp something currently beyond them. Ailey mentioned the use of earth-tone colours as signifying that the journey is from earth toward heaven. It pictures humanity reaching for the transcendent. Much of the movement takes place on the floor, again symbolizing the ‘earthboundness’ of the plight of the dancers. Alexander Kafka describes the motif as ‘rising up while beaten down.’ He describes the movements as ‘aspirational’ and ‘mournful’.³³⁷

I Been ‘Buked... ‘is about coming from the dirt, the sorrow and hard times. It’s like a prayer, a very soft and yearning asking for help.’³³⁸ The piece depicts rejection, pain, and the weight of the world on your shoulders. The dancers wear simple attire in earth-tone colours. The dancers begin with arms and hands reaching up to the sky, with feet firmly rooted into the ground, displaying a yearning for something higher.³³⁹ The dancers embody a search for transcendence or God. Their arms are spread wide, palms upward, as they tilt their heads back and look heavenward, as they maintain a wide-stance posture with feet firmly planted on the ground. The movement depicts the theme of ‘split focus’ of physical bondage awaiting

³³⁶ Author Unknown, ‘Alvin Ailey, “Revelations” (1960) Performed April 28, 2012 [Review],’ *Beyond The Notes Multimedia Guide to the Arts*; entry was posted 29 April, 2012; <https://www.beyondthenotes.org/blog/alvin-ailey-revelations-1960/>; accessed 5 September, 2023.

³³⁷ Alexander Kafka, ‘Dance Review: Alvin Ailey’s Old and New Revelations,’ *DCTheaterScene.com*, 5 February, 2020; <https://dctheatrescene.com/2020/02/05/dance-review-alvin-aileys-old-and-new-revelations/>; accessed 3 September, 2023.

³³⁸ Constance Stamatiou, dancer, AAADT, from his interview with Lyndsey Winship, in Lyndsey Winship, ‘“I was Flabbergasted By The Sight”: Alvin Ailey Dancers On Their Legendary Revelations,’ *The Guardian* Wednesday, 16 August, 2003; <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2023/aug/16/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater-revelations-interviews>; accessed 4 September, 2023.

³³⁹ Rachel McLaren, AAADT dancer, from ‘What “Revelations Means to Me”’; <https://vimeo.com/159863911>; accessed 7 September, 2023.

‘spiritual deliverance.’³⁴⁰ The lyrics accentuate this motif: ‘I’ve been ‘buked’ and ‘there is trouble all over the world.’

The repeated movement of the piece is the dancers transitioning from a synchronized group into individuals in space, then coming back together. While in group formation, the dancers perform slow rotations from the torso while in a deep posture with knees bent, continually reaching upward. Eventually, the movement becomes quicker, punctuated by pirouettes and kicks. The dancers employ transitions of levels; they move high to low, ending intricate spins by moving to the ground. DeFrantz suggests this portrays the ‘exhaustion’ from the exertion of reaching for the higher while always being pushed down.³⁴¹ The use of both group synchronization and individuals in space is meant to symbolize the African American shared experience of suffering and the individual participation in that communal suffering. According to DeFrantz, the repetition suggests that no matter how far apart the dancers may move on stage, they eventually must come back together in order ‘to complete the communal expression of spirituality.’³⁴² The piece concludes, however, on the final lyric, ‘sho’s you’ born’ as the dancers perform an erratic and ‘fragmented opening of the arm from overhead’, which DeFrantz suggests demonstrates the arrival of the Holy Spirit upon the community.³⁴³

In this opening piece, Ailey highlights the plight of persons, or a people, in bondage and suffering. Their cry is for a new and different life, a life of freedom, with meaning and full of hope. Their desire is for a good life, a life worth living, a life of fullness. While Taylor may have focused on the *malaise* of the secular age, Ailey’s portrayal of the world as a place of suffering is equally characteristic of a secular age.

³⁴⁰ DeFrantz, pg. 6.

³⁴¹ Ibid., pg. 6.

³⁴² Ibid., pg. 6.

³⁴³ Ibid., pg. 6.



14. The opening of *I've Been 'Buked*

Didn't Our Lord Deliver Daniel is virtually dance as prayer, symbolizing hope for a deliverance for the dancers of the kind experienced by the Biblical prophet Daniel.³⁴⁴ The piece begins with three dancers once again in unison, heads back, looking heavenward. The music is more upbeat than *'Buked*. The dancers quickly separate; a female descends to the floor, while the other two, a male and a female move, in unison stage right. The dancer on the floor performs short, struggling movements, representing personal affliction, while the chorus sings of God's past deliverances.³⁴⁵ The dancer's 'torso ripples percussively in a physical exaggeration of beating a drum or being flogged at a whipping post.³⁴⁶ The rhetorical question is asked, 'If the Lord can deliver those in the past, why can he not deliver me now? Or any person?' The dancers separate as before, this time the duet is stage left. The soloist is again performing movements of struggle and invocation. The remainder of the piece has quick interchanges of synchronized dancing and solo work as the choir repeats the chorus.

³⁴⁴ See the Old Testament book of *Daniel*, chapter 6.

³⁴⁵ [Chorus]

Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel?
 Deliver Daniel, deliver Daniel?
 Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel?
 And why not every man?

[Verse 1]

He delivered Daniel from the lion's den
 And Jonah from the belly of the whale
 And the Hebrew children from the fiery furnace
 Why not every man?

³⁴⁶ DeFrantz, pg. 6.

The piece ends with all three dancers on the floor, backs arched, looking heavenward, and arms extended to God in invocation for deliverance.

Fix Me Jesus follows *Didn't Our Lord Deliver Daniel* and the viewers witness the beginning of salvation. The piece is a duet. It begins with a female dancer facing the audience and her partner (presumably portraying Jesus or perhaps a guardian angel) directly behind her. Her hands are reaching upward and she sways in a 'troubled circle from the waist.' DeFrantz describes the opening as the woman in a private moment of 'emotional prayer,' while the male - whom DeFrantz interprets as a guardian angel - 'waiting to assist the praying woman.' She does not see him, and throughout the piece seems unaware of his presence or help.³⁴⁷ Throughout the 4:06 piece, the male guides the women through a series of movements. Sometimes they are together, sometimes apart. Yet the woman remains unaware of his presence. Minimal floor work is used. Instead he lifts, carries or supports her no less than ten times in the piece. A climactic moment occurs approximately at the two-minute mark of the piece as the woman is horizontal to the floor, upheld only by his hand behind her neck. Her complete dependence on his assistance remains unnoticed.



15. *Fix Me, Jesus*

³⁴⁷ DeFrantz, pg. 7.

The audience is left to wonder what the woman might be thinking as she moves through difficult times and towards salvation. Does she wonder how she is getting through? Does she suspect a greater force or reality is aiding her? From where comes her ability to continue? The refrain is repeated throughout.³⁴⁸ The piece ends with her perched upon his leg, arms reaching upward, portraying her having reached the exalted goal. Schultz describes the ending as ‘a partner that lifts and carries the other to a new world.’³⁴⁹ Given the title of the piece, the woman attributes her exaltation to her unseen Lord.

With these last two pieces, *Daniel* and *Fix Me*, Ailey draws on his own subjectivity. He presents an alternative to the secular plight: something higher, or rather, *someone* higher, someone not limited or constrained by the immanent frame who can be present with the one(s) suffering or in difficult circumstances. The God of the prophet Daniel, in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, comes to the sufferer *within* the circumstances in which a person finds him- or herself, *within* the immanent frame.

3.3 *Take Me To The Water*

The second section opens with *Processional/Honor, Honor*. The story here is the processional to a baptismal service. Seven dancers, dressed in white, one female (deaconess) carrying an umbrella and two males carrying poles adorned with ribbons, run and move joyfully on a stage bathed in blue lighting. The two initiates, one male and one female, are identifiable by their lack of props. The lyrics encourage them, ‘Run along children, be baptized/mighty pretty meeting by the water side/Honor, honor unto the dying lamb.’ As the deaconess and the two male acolytes exit stage left, the two initiates have a momentary

³⁴⁸ [Refrain]

Oh, fix me; Oh, fix me;

Oh, fix me. Fix me, Jesus, fix me.

³⁴⁹ Chuck Schultz, ‘Audience Review: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre’s “Revelations Through the Decades,”’ *The Dance Enthusiast: A Moving Parts Project*.

celebratory duet. They are not dancing together; instead they are preparing themselves for the initiatory rite.³⁵⁰ A blessing is received by the initiates, and then they and their sponsors make their way to the waters through synchronized movements. Two other male dancers now appear, bringing sheer material representing the waters. The scene is filled with vibrancy and excitement. The entire piece is preparatory for the baptismal rite. It communicates great joy yet seriousness regarding what is about to take place.

Processional/Honor, Honor immediately segues into *Wade In The Water*. This is the centerpiece for the entire production. The moment of rebirth. The baptismal rite is about to take place. Blue lighting and long sheets of material representing the water accentuate the stage. The deaconess with the umbrella leads the initiates to the water by her own solo performance. Her 'dutiful presence inspires calm,' joy and solemnity.³⁵¹ The deaconess exits the stage, and the initiates dance together for the remainder of the song. The entire piece runs approximately four minutes. The initiates have the stage for almost two minutes of that time. The focus is on them and what is happening to them in the baptismal rite. They are entering new life. Floor work provides the climactic moments for the initiates, representing their going into the waters of baptism to be reborn. As the initiates rise out of the water, the entire ensemble returns to the stage to celebrate the initiates new life.

The song *Wade In The Water* is believed to be associated with the Underground Railroad, which was a network of safe passageways and safe houses used by those assisting slaves who were escaping the South.³⁵² It is speculated that Harriet Tubman, one of the leaders of the Underground Railroad movement, used the song to encourage escaping slaves to use rivers and waterways, rather than trails, in order to prevent dogs from following their

³⁵⁰ DeFrantz, pg. 10.

³⁵¹ Ibid., pg. 11.

³⁵² Berry, Kenyatta D., "Singing in Slavery: Songs of Survival, Songs of Freedom". PBS NewsHour, 27 January, 2017.

scent.³⁵³ The motif of deliverance through water hearkens back to the Israelites' escape from Egyptian slavery. Later versions of the song became an anthem during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.³⁵⁴ Ailey incorporated the song specifically for its metaphorical value of 'the baptismal, the purification rite.'³⁵⁵ Due to Ailey's use of the multivalent metaphor of purification, salvation, or deliverance, there exists the possibility of layers of interpretation.



16. Preparing for baptism

The surface interpretation is a baptismal rite performed during a Southern Baptist worship service. It may even be Ailey's own baptism. Certainly, Ailey is inviting his (secular) audience to join him in the waters of rebirth in order to experience the freedom he had experienced. He offers his audiences a way *through* a life of pain, tribulation and suffering. He suggests that immediate, physical existence or situation in this world may not immediately change or change at all. But he is presenting a way *through* this life within the

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Jacob Iutti, 'Behind The Meaning of the Classical Gospel Song "Wade In the Water," *American Songwriter The Craft of Music*,' <https://americansongwriter.com/behind-the-meaning-of-the-classic-gospel-song-wade-in-the-water/>; accessed 5 September, 2023.

³⁵⁵ Alvin Ailey American Dance, **AILEY**Pressroom, *Revelations*; <https://pressroom.alvinailey.org/alvin-ailey-american-dance-theater/repertory/revelations>; accessed 4 September, 2023.

immanent frame, a way in which a person can find hope, joy, and deliverance of a spiritual nature *through* the waters of baptism. Through this piece Ailey offers the secular unbeliever the path to find meaning, joy, hope and fullness. The experience of transcendence is possible, and it is necessarily found within the immanent. The attempt to escape the immanent frame is a futile endeavour. *Wade In The Water* is the path to fullness. Matthew Rushing, rehearsal director and guest artist testifies that he experienced a transcendent moment when he witnessed *Wade in the Water* after having recently been baptized. What spoke to him was, ‘my life experiences *danced* on stage. I didn’t think that was possible!’³⁵⁶

At a deeper interpretive level, Danto might ask, is Ailey attempting to communicate something of the necessity and desire for greater freedom for the entire African American community, even as the Israelites experienced it - the kind of freedom that Ailey himself sought to bring about as a black choreographer in the dance world of the 1950s and 1960s?

DeFrantz suggests such an idea,³⁵⁷

Revelations created an optimistic, chronological narrative of African American release from physical slavery in its ordering of spirituals from dark, somber-themed lyrics of ‘I’ve Been ‘Buked,’ and ‘Daniel,’ through the up-beat songs of ritual ceremony in ‘Honor, Honor’ and ‘Wade in the Water,’ to the gospel exclamations of the ‘good news,’ ‘Rocka My Soul.’ The musical sequence suggests a historical triumph, a movement toward freedom. This narrative optimism, encompassed by the actual structure of the dance, confidently reflected Ailey’s effort to create an American dance theater born of African American expressive practice, consistently placed Ailey’s enterprise apart from other, similar efforts.

Deep interpretation would also ask what this might mean for a non-African American in the audience. Questions of interpretation a viewer might have might be, ‘What is Ailey saying to me?’ and ‘From what do I need to be freed?’

Having been baptized and entered new life, the solo male dancer, dressed in white, agonizes in what could be interpreted as an act of penance in *I Want to Be Ready*. This piece features much floor work and short, repetitive actions that visualize and punctuate the lyrics. The dancer makes use of the floor and his own incredible torso strength. He appears to

³⁵⁶ Matthew Rushing, from ‘What “Revelations” Means to Me’; <https://vimeo.com/159863911>; accessed 7 September, 2023.

³⁵⁷ DeFrantz, pg. 16.

struggle and ‘alternates holding his body with fearful tension and releasing that tension in controlled resignation.’³⁵⁸ The movements of the dance provide the visual for his internal struggle, as revealed by the lyrics: ‘I would not be a sinner/I’ll tell you the reason why/’Cuz if my Lord should call on me/Lord, I wouldn’t be ready to die.’ His movements include a V-hold with legs and arms extending heavenward; he stands, then falls again, only to glance longingly back toward heaven. The oft-repeated refrain provides the theme of the piece, ‘I wanna be ready/I wanna be ready/I wanna be ready/Lord/ to put on/my long white robe.’



17. *I Wanna Be Ready*

His commitment to the Lord through his baptism is taken seriously, and he desires a life of transformation and faithfulness. Baptism was only the beginning; the life-long journey of spirituality has begun. He wants to live his life in such a way that he finds fulfilment in Christian spirituality and will thus be ‘ready’ to meet the Lord when his time in the immanent frame is over. Taylor has been suggesting that this is the significance of fullness; it orientates a person toward the transcendent. Transcendence is the meaning of fullness. Fullness provides glimpses of what life could, or perhaps should be. It points a person toward the life

³⁵⁸ Ibid., pg. 9.

that is worth living, the Good Life. However, Ailey has taken us beyond Taylor's notion of fullness. Ailey explicitly suggests a theological answer to the search for meaning and significance that Taylor proposes secular people experience: a move toward the transcendent God through Christian spirituality.

3.4 *Move, Members, Move*

The final section of *Revelations* consists of four numbers: *Sinner Man*, *The Day is Past and Gone*, *You May Run*, and *Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham*. Together, they bring the story to its climactic conclusion in celebration of salvation by the church community, as suggested by the title.

Sinner Man features high-energy movement, which alerts the viewer to the fear and angst of the dancers. The frantic pace of the dancers consists of fragmented, stop-and-start movements, yet contained in some of the most technically precise dance in all of *Revelations*. The three male dancers appear shirtless, and as much and as fast as they move across the space of the stage, often going to the very edge, they always run out of room. Each dancer has a solo portion in the piece, symbolizing the individual need or struggle to reconcile with God. The lyrics highlight their plight: 'Sinner man/Where you gonna run to?/Sinner man, where you gonna run to?/Where you gonna run to?/All on that day.' *Sinner Man* may be autobiographical for Ailey. Ailey has portrayed the difficulty of life as an African American male. However, the greater plight is his sin, and the prospect of one day facing God in judgment. The sea and the rocks cannot hide Sinner Man from the coming judgment.

DeFrantz describes *Revelations* as it was performed for television in its first complete form on 4 March 1962. In that performance, *Sinner Man* was placed between *Fix Me Jesus*

and *I Wanna Be Ready*.³⁵⁹ However, theologically, it fits well in this position. The piece is the voice of the evangelizing church. An interpretation of *Sinner Man* is the call of the church to the unbaptized to join them in this story of struggle, surrender and salvation.



18. *Sinner Man*

The Day is Gone and Past, *You May Run On*, and *Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham* usher the audience into the church service where salvation will be celebrated. Everyone is dressed in ‘Sunday best.’ In *Day*, all female dancers - wearing the cultural costumes from Ailey’s childhood era, including fans and hats - set up stools, welcoming the audience to the service. The first verse of the song provides the music for the opening.³⁶⁰ It is time to celebrate. The piece quickly segues into *You May Run On*. Here, the church preaches and celebrates the good news. God Almighty will judge the wicked, but Jesus will save.³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ *Revelations* as it appeared in 1962 included sixteen selections. It ran for over an hour. Ailey edited the work several times in order to fit the piece for various venues. The canonical version is presented in this study.

³⁶⁰ *The Day in Gone and Past*:

‘The day is past and gone,
The evening shades appear.
O may we all remember well
The night of death draws nigh.’

³⁶¹ *You May Run On*:

‘Well you may run on for a long time
Run on for a long time
Run on for a long time
Let me tell you God almighty gonna cut you down

The women are joined by the men, and the community celebrates. *Rocka My Soul in the Bosom of Abraham* closes the performance. All eleven couples dance in unison; no dancer performs a solo; the movements are joyful and synchronized, symbolizing the church community coming together in an exuberant celebration of hope. The music, costumes, and atmosphere exude African American spirituality. The entire stage is consistently filled with worshipers; all the space is used. This piece runs nearly seven minutes long - three minutes and a three-minute encore - and includes several key changes, each one moving to a higher key, carrying the audience with the dancers to a higher and higher register. The chorus provides the structure of the dance and expresses both the individual's and the community's hope.³⁶² The entire piece is large, colourful and high energy. Final freedom and deliverance are near, 'My soul is glad/My soul is free/I'm going home/I'm going home/To live with Thee!' Perfect happiness is now in sight. The piece ends with a magnificently well-lighted stage and the entire ensemble on their knees, arms lifted joyfully to heaven. The dancers/worshipers have reached their goal. The piece ends in stark contrast to the way *Revelations* opened: a darkened stage occupied by dancers in earthbound colours, striving to reach upward while being pressed down. In the end, the journey from struggle to surrender to salvation is complete.

Go tell that midnight rider,
Tell the gambler, rambler, back-biter
Tell them God almighty gonna cut them down

My head's been wet with midnight dews
The morning star is witnessed too
I never shall forget that day
When Jesus washed my sins away.'

³⁶² [Chorus]

Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham,
Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham,
Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham,
Oh, rock-a my soul!



19. *Rocka My Soul*

4 Conclusion: *Revelations* as Gospel Presentation

I maintain that Ailey has taken his audience on a journey. A journey from struggle to surrender to salvation. His message explicitly resonates on several levels. It is for the community, a people who hope for deliverance and freedom from pain and oppression. It is also for the individual seeking freedom from the pain, hardships and tribulations experienced in this world. Ailey's story takes place within Taylor's immanent frame; it can be no other way. This is the age we inhabit. Thus, while Ailey does not address life in a secular age specifically, as Taylor does, the message of freedom, deliverance and hope as found in the human experience of struggle, surrender, and salvation is common enough that any audience can find a theological answer to Taylor's question of fullness in *Revelations*.

Ailey is thus explicit in his presentation of the gospel in *Revelations*. Christian spirituality is presented, through the work, as a viable and plausible answer to the common human plight of difficulty, struggle and hardship experienced in this world, wherever a person may experience it. The work contains all four approaches to theological aesthetics as outlined by McCollough. The viewer may experience the ecstatic draw of beauty or the existential dimension of the work. It may be the sacramental nature of the work or the

revelatory event that one finds attractive. In any case, the work certainly provides punctuated, ‘wow!’ moments of fullness. However, Ailey takes us beyond fullness and into the transcendent. Through experiencing *Revelations*, a person may begin a spiritual journey that, as Taylor surmises, may yet lead ‘them into the practices which are their main access to traditional forms of faith’ (Taylor, 2007, pg. 518). *Revelations* offers the viewers a path to God.

Conclusion

Is There a need for the project? Thesis and Aim

‘Artists may be the vanguard for Christian missions in a secular age. Art can be an essential contribution to the Christian Church’s missional endeavours in our contemporary Western context.’ I opened this dissertation with these words. How did we arrive at a place where a statement like that can be made? The research question is, ‘Can art be a medium for connection with God?’ The answers to this question provided a bridge between Taylor’s philosophical notion of the experience of fullness and the theological concept of how secular people could connect with or move toward the transcendent God through the medium of art. This study contributes to missiological discourse at the intersection of theology, art, culture and mission by taking Taylor’s notion of fullness a step further than Taylor does. It demonstrated that art is not only a medium for the experience of fullness; it a *locus theologicus*, a space in which the presence of God is active. In this space, an aesthetic experience of works of art can move a person toward the transcendent God. Therefore, this study concluded that art can be a medium through which the Christian Church can help people in a secular age to move toward the transcendent God.

Trajectory and Key Points

Several key concepts that shaped the argument were defined to arrive at this conclusion. First, how did Taylor arrive at the notion of fullness? Chapter One discussed this. The key point from this chapter is that much of Taylor’s corpus from, *Sources of the Self* to *A Secular Age*, focused on questions of human flourishing. His language and concepts developed over the years, but the concept remains consistent: How do people live a good life? He settled on the notion of fullness in *A Secular Age*.

That brings us to our next key point. What is meant by a secular age? Charles Taylor employs the term in his analysis of late modernity's cultural context. A key point regarding a secular age is that all ideologies and beliefs are contestable. Western culture in late modernity is not godless. Faith in God is simply no longer the default cultural interpretation of the way things are.

A primary characteristic of a secular age is what Taylor calls the *immanent frame*. It is Taylor's descriptive term for how modern, secular people view the world. The immanent frame is a background for modern thinking. It is often unchallenged, unnoticed and unarticulated from within which values, beliefs, decisions and lifestyle choices are made. It does not furnish people with a set of beliefs; rather, it is the context in which secular people form beliefs and make value judgements. There are three key points regarding the immanent frame. First, the frame is immanent. People within the frame have occluded transcendence from their worldview or are simply uninterested in transcendence. Transcendence Taylor defines as that which is beyond us. It could be a power, person or force beyond ourselves and the frame. The key point about the immanent frame is that it describes a world that defines itself and the things that are important within it, without reference to the transcendent or God. Transcendence has been blocked out or ignored. Transcendence as this study defines it is the presence of God, his *nearness*, his *unspeakability*, *unthinkability*, *invisibility*, and his *uncontainability*, as he is manifested within the immanent frame.

As mentioned above,³⁶³ the situation created by the immanent frame poses a critical question for missional Christians. If this is a view of the world that secular people have, and we believe that it is an incorrect view, then do we simply need tell secular unbelievers to abandon their view and accept our theistic worldview? This is a faulty strategy because secular unbelievers will most likely dismiss that suggestion outright. This strategy may not

³⁶³ See Chapter 2, 1.1 of this dissertation.

even be possible, given that the worldview provided by the background beliefs is presupposed and often unchallenged. However, recognizing this situation is the necessary starting point for the Church's missional endeavours. Therefore, the strategy for the Christian Church is to find a way to *bypass* the frame and to employ fresh expressions of the gospel that can reach a secular generation. This study proposes that art and aesthetic experiences of works of art offer such a path toward the Transcendent God.

The second key point of the immanent frame is that people within the immanent frame desire *fullness*. Fullness can be experienced in an event, an activity or a condition. It is the experience that a person has when he or she feels that life is being lived to the full. Life is fully realized and is as it should be in that punctuated moment. William Dyrness wrote that everyone, at some point in their life, has a project that makes getting out of bed every day worthwhile. Fullness can be experienced in various activities such as a vocation, being in nature, supporting a favourite sports team, pursuing money, sex or power. Fullness is found in the activities that give life meaning and significance.

A third key point of the immanent frame is the Romantic impulse. The Romantic impulse is the attitudes and values that characterized the Romantic movement of the late eighteenth century that are prevalent today. Romantic thought values the individual and his- or her feelings and uniqueness. Emotions and experiences became sources of truth, and everyone was free to be themselves and express themselves however they saw fit. Art became the driving force for Romantic *expressivism*. Art becomes an ethical space where people express themselves, their desires and their truth. The essential aspect of the Romantic impulse is that it is a valued characteristic of today's modern secular culture, which is a vital reason that aesthetic experiences of art can be a medium of experiences of fullness.

It is in this context that the Christian Church attempts to carry out its mission. This study defines missions in the widest sense. Missions include everything the Christian Church

might do to present the message of Jesus Christ to the world. It includes proclamation of all types, social action such as caring for the sick, homeless and hungry. Indeed, missions intend to offer an explicit presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in an attempt to encourage a person to commit to follow Christ. However, it is equally important that missions include anything the Church might do in order to point unbelievers to the transcendent God and anything the Church might do in order to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ, either explicitly or implicitly.

A key point or question for the Christian Church as it seeks to carry out its mission in a secular age is: How do we step into secular space, a space in which all beliefs and ideologies are contestable, and communicate to people that a life worth living, a fully realized life, can be found in relationship with the transcendent God through his Son Jesus Christ?

We begin that mission where secular culture allows us to begin. Taylor has proposed that secular people seek experiences of fullness. Taylor proposes that fullness is a reflection of transcendence and that transcendence is the meaning of fullness. Transcendence is the goal. The definition of transcendence offered in this study is the presence of God as he is manifested within the immanent frame. How can the Christian Church begin with Taylor's philosophical notion of fullness, which it must do, but then go beyond that and offer that what is happening theologically is that people are desiring God? We can propose that the philosophical desire for transcendence is the theological longing for God. How do we help secular people to see this? Is there a path to transcendence?

That is the point of the research question. We begin with Taylor's philosophical concept of fullness and present art and aesthetic experiences of art as a medium for experiencing fullness. However, we can take Taylor a step further and suggest that art is a theological space where people can encounter the transcendent God. But what is art, and how can it be a medium for fullness? How do we bridge the gap between the philosophical notion

of fullness and the theological concept of an experience of the transcendent God through the medium of art?

A key point is the concept of art as promulgated by Jacques Maritain. For Maritain, art is a virtue of the Practical Intellect. It is the interior ability of *making*, rather than the object on the wall or in the gallery. Maritain offers a pathway to understanding art and its effects on the viewers of art. If art is only the object on the wall, then how do we explain the profound impact that works of art can have on the viewers? For Maritain, the aesthetic experience of art, from its creation to its viewing takes place in the interiority of a person. The work of art is a product of the human ability to engage with the world, have experiences, and then communicate that intuitive knowledge. The experience of art is an encounter of persons. The artist invites the viewer to share his or her understanding of the world through the communication of the artist's subjectivity through the medium of the work of art. The 'wow!' moments of aesthetic experiences of works of art are consistent with Taylor's description of the experience of fullness. Maritain, therefore, offers an aesthetic response to Taylor's philosophical notion of fullness.

Another key point is that art is a *locus theologicus*. It is a theological space where a person may encounter the transcendent God. Works of art can be considered God's grandchild. Therefore, aesthetic experiences of works of art can take the viewers to the threshold of the divine mysteries. How can they enter in?

What is lacking is a theological bridge that connects the two philosophical concepts of 1) the notion of the experience of fullness and 2) art as a medium for that experience. Art is *how* a person can experience fullness. What is needed now is a *why*. Why is this experience possible? What about the human being's constitution makes them capable of such experiences? The anthropology of Thomas Aquinas offers a sufficient answer. Aquinas is the crucial theological core of the study. Humanity is created as *imago Dei*.

Moreover, Aquinas' understanding of *imago Dei* allows us to go beyond Taylor's notion of the experience of fullness. Because human beings are *imago Dei*, they are able to experience God and enter into a relationship with him. Several key points emerge from Aquinas' theory.

The key point is that the experience of fullness through the medium of art is possible for two reasons. First, according to Aquinas, all people desire happiness. They desire a life worth living. Activities and things in this world can offer a measure of *imperfect happiness*, but people pursue these things nonetheless. Aquinas anticipates Taylor's concept that all people desire fullness or a life lived to the full.

Second, human beings are passionate people. People are driven to pursue what they perceive to be desirable or good for them. The perception that a thing might be good for a person ignites the passion of love or desire. Again, Aquinas is anticipating Taylor. A person experiencing fullness and a person passionately aroused are having similar experiences. The contention of this study is that art can be a medium for an experience of fullness because these two experiences are similar in nature. Aesthetic experiences of art can awaken desires and passions, as in experiences of fullness.

The key points regarding humanity as *imago Dei* and an encounter with the transcendent God through aesthetic experiences of art also have two elements. First, according to Aquinas, humanity is the horizon or bridge between heaven and earth. Human beings are *hylomorphic* creatures, consisting of body and soul. Human beings are capable of experiencing, understanding, and interpreting the realities of both the spiritual and material aspects of the world, even if imperfectly. Human connection with the divine is possible because that is what they are designed for.

The second key point, according to Aquinas, is that all people have a 'natural' desire for God. God desires to be known and loved, so he has given every person a *supernatural*

existential from the moment of their creation. The *supernatural existential* is part of human ontology, i.e., who we are as human beings. It is supernatural because it enables human beings to do what is absolutely beyond human nature: to know, love and experience God. It is a part of our very being therefore it is existential. Therefore, human beings are capable of connecting with or experiencing God.

Aquinas' concept of humanity as *imago Dei* is crucial because it provides the *why* human beings can experience fullness, and to go beyond that, to encounter God within the immanent frame. Aquinas' anthropology furnishes the necessary theological bridge between the two philosophical concepts of the experience of fullness and art as a medium for that experience. Beyond that, *imago Dei* allows for a genuine encounter with the transcendent God through aesthetic experiences of works of art.

Contribution to Knowledge

My contribution to knowledge is to raise important questions at the intersection of theology, art, culture, and Christian mission. This thesis accomplished this task by proposing a theological bridge that connects philosopher Charles Taylor's notion of the experience of fullness with the theological understanding of how individuals in a secular age might connect with the transcendent God through the medium of art. In doing so, this thesis illustrates a fresh perspective regarding how the Christian Church can carry out its mission of presenting the message of Jesus Christ to a secular generation through the medium of art.

Applications from this research

1) Art As The Vanguard of The Christian Mission Endeavor in a Secular Age

Art could be the vanguard of Christian missions in the secular age. According to *Merriam-Webster*, vanguard is the forefront of an action or movement. A vanguard leads the

way, whether a person or an object. Artists who are Christians and who employ their talents in their vocation as artists may be the ones who lead the contemporary Church in its evangelistic endeavours in the secular age.

At the 2022 Good News Conference, Bishop Robert Barron presented a keynote address entitled, ‘Beauty in the Catholic Tradition.’³⁶⁴ He also published an article entitled, ‘Evangelizing Through Beauty’, which follows the same line of thought. The main point of Barron’s speech is that the Beautiful, the Good and the True exist in the world as objective realities. These are visible as God’s fingerprint on his creation. Moreover, of the three, beauty can be the point of the spear, or the vanguard, for evangelization efforts of the Church in our day.

To illustrate his point, Barron used the example of the game of baseball. If a person wanted to ‘evangelize’ a friend about the game of baseball so that his friend would come to love the game to the point of wanting to participate in it, then he would not begin his introduction of baseball by explaining some obscure rule, such as the ‘infield fly’ rule. Rather, he would take his friend to the ballpark so that they could experience the game together. The beauty of the athleticism and flow of the game would likely attract the friend far more than beginning with the rule book. Barron’s point is that the beauty of the game, when experienced, will be far more alluring to the uninitiated friend than any manual on baseball. In other words, the best strategy for ‘evangelization’ to baseball is to provide an *experience* of the game. Barron argues that his strategy is the same for religion. Barron employs illustrations from the world of the visual arts. In a summary of his speech he writes,

Friends, at the 2022 Good News Conference, I spoke on the evangelical power of beauty in the Catholic tradition. True beauty leads by steady steps if we allow its power to work on us and lead us to the ultimate source of beauty, Christ. Show the Sistine Chapel or Chartres Cathedral; show someone how to read ‘Brideshead Revisited,’ the stories of Flannery O’Connor, the poetry of T.S. Eliot; listen to Beethoven’s ‘Seventh Symphony.’ Show the great tradition of beauty. It’s not as threatening; it draws people in.

³⁶⁴ Bp. Robert Barron, ‘Beauty in the Catholic Tradition,’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbfWTlPt8mU>, 23 February, 2023; accessed 9 January, 2024.

Beauty, Barron argues, is what draws people into a conversation. From there, the conversation can proceed toward the good and the true. The desire to participate in baseball is sparked in the person to be ‘evangelized.’ The next step is when the person has an increased desire to understand the game at a deeper level. A ‘convert’ to baseball has been made. Barron likens this to the evangelization of non-Christians through beauty and works of art. Barron wrote a follow-up article in which he briefly describes what he believes to be the best evangelistic strategy.³⁶⁵ The strategy is to begin with beauty, proceed to the good and finally to the true. His logic is sound.

Barron argues this way because he sees the current modern secular context in the same terms as Taylor, though he does not use Taylor’s precise language of a secular age. Barron recognizes that our ‘current cultural matrix’ is ‘dominated by relativism.’ An individual’s right and ability to create his or her own system of meaning and truth-claims is considered heroic. Given this situation, Barron argues, it becomes almost impossible to begin the evangelization process with a conversation about the true or the good. The person to be evangelized will likely reply to our efforts, ‘Who are you to tell me how to behave or what to think, or to tell me that my alternative lifestyle is not good?’ They may even assert that we have no right to claim a knowledge of moral truth. Another path must be found to initiate a conversation in such cases.

According to Barron, this new strategy is through beauty. He cites several works of art from various mediums, including ballet.³⁶⁶ These function as ‘alchemy in the soul.’ These works of art first awaken a desire to participate, then to imitate, and then to share in the worldview of the works. Barron is following Wolterstorff’s concept of *world-projection*,

³⁶⁵ Bp. Robert Barron, ‘Evangelizing Through Beauty,’ *Word On Fire*, 5 July, 2022; <https://www.wordonfire.org/articles/barron/evangelizing-through-beauty/>; accessed 9 January, 2024.

³⁶⁶ He writes, ‘Just look at the Sistine Chapel Ceiling or the Parthenon or Chartres Cathedral or Picasso’s “Guernica”; just read The Divine Comedy or Hamlet or The Wasteland; just watch Mother Teresa’s sisters working in the slums of Calcutta or Rory McIlroy’s golf swing or the movements of a ballet dancer.’

although without referring to Wolterstorff. In other words, a work of art first captures the attention and imagination of the viewer. Through the work of art, a desire for the world that the work portrays is illuminated - the viewer is alerted to things they did not know previously. They are introduced to ideas, or knowledge of the world, or things of the world which they previously had not known or encountered. A 'love' or a desire is birthed within the viewer for something they do not currently possess. Barron explains,

The pattern is more or less as follows: first the beautiful (how wonderful!), then the good (I want to participate!) and finally the true (now I understand!).

In other words, according to Barron, the viewer first has a 'wow!' moment and is captivated by the beauty of the work of art, igniting the passion of love or desire. This initial response is followed by a recognition of the good that the world of the work portrays. The viewer wants to participate in the world that the work is presenting. This desire will move the viewer to pursue the good offered by the work. The viewer will then move to pursue the truth that the work is presenting with the intention of coming to an understanding of the moral universe of the work. Religion, Christianity, or the things of God can be presented through works of art. Bishop Barron heralds from the Roman Catholic tradition. Yet his point applies to all artists who are Christian and who want to be creative and employ their creative talents in an evangelistic vocation. What he proposes is applicable to the entire evangelizing Church in our modern secular context.

This dissertation is not about beauty *per se* as the medium for evangelistic methodology. However, it agrees with Barron's assessment that the current secular context is best approached from the *aesthetic* rather than the epistemological perspective. In other words, a missiological 'frontal assault', which begins with a discourse about the good or the true, or on beliefs and values, is likely to be rebuffed. However, as Barron has provided examples, Christian missions rooted in an aesthetic approach presented through works of art,

is likely to be effective. Artists can be ‘missional’ in their vocation and works of art can function as vehicles which draw people to God. Barron’s concludes that works of art,

[These] would function in the manner of Brideshead, captivating even the most bored agnostic. Then, the wager goes, the captivation would lead to a desire, perhaps vague at first, to participate in the moral universe that made those artistic expressions possible. And finally, the participation would conduce toward a true and experiential understanding of the thought patterns that undergird that way of life. First the beautiful, then the good, then the true.

Art could be the vanguard of Christian missions in the secular age.

How might this work? Since works of art may offer an *implicit* presentation of Biblical Christian themes, this provides language that could make sense to secular unbelievers and will provide a common ground for religious dialogue. Works of art, even by artists who are unbelievers, can help initiate religious conversation. Works of art such as *Revelations* are *explicit* in their presentation of the gospel message. Viewers may have a positive experience of the work and, therefore, an easier time understanding the message presented. This being the case, what is the nature of *implicit* works of art?

Here, Taylor is correct in using the terms and concepts such as fullness and transcendence to describe something beyond the individual. As demonstrated above, defining transcendence in the language of distance, measurement, remoteness, or gaps is a categorical mistake. A language of *nearness* and *presence* captures the reality of transcendence much more accurately, though secular seekers on a quest may not realize this. As Taylor notes, the language they use to describe their experiences is the language of gaps. The challenge of the Church is to enter a conversation with them and provide language and proper definitions of their experiences for them. Christians are on the modern-day Mars Hill, and our secular conversation partners are having, as Taylor describes them, religious experiences; they are looking at the altar of the Unknown God.³⁶⁷ The job of the Church is to provide clarification and explanation of those experiences for them. Moreover, it is legitimate if the only thing a

³⁶⁷ Acts 17:23.

secular person is able to comprehend is that they experienced something beyond themselves. The person knows nothing of a Triune God or an incarnate Jesus Christ; they simply had a profound and moving experience.

There are two ways to approach the possibility of examining and explaining the experiences that secular unbelievers can have through the experience of art. The first is what we might call the *theological* perspective. This perspective begins with the assumption that God, unbeknownst to our subject - we will call her Annie - is the primary actor; God is the active agent and he has initiated an encounter with Annie. From here, we could ask how the Holy Spirit is to be involved - how does he work in such situations? How is God drawing Annie into this encounter? What role does divine grace, prevenient or otherwise, operate on a person in this encounter with God? Each of these questions would be beneficial studies.

Alternatively, we could begin with the individual and her experience from her perspective. This we might call the *missional* perspective. Suppose Annie is a viewer of art. Perhaps Annie viewed a film, a sculpture, a fine painting or a dance piece. Perhaps Annie was at the Tate Gallery, where she viewed Damien Hirst's installation piece *A Thousand Years*. Given that this study has defined transcendence as the presence of God within the immanent frame and art as a *locus theologicus*, it can be suggested that while viewing *A Thousand Years*, Annie had a profound encounter with the presence of God through the work. She felt a sense of awe regarding her humanity and mortality. She felt competing internal pressures that produced a fear of the imminence of death and an exhilaration of life. Johnston's research bears witness to these types of reactions. She was then moved to pursue a life lived to the fullest, which may include being orientated to God. How could a Christian initiate a conversation with Annie to explain what she experienced?

First, it can be affirmed that *A Thousand Years* did its job. Hirst created the work in the way that he did in order to share with his viewers his perspective and his obsession, with

life and death. Through the work, he invited his viewers to contemplate and feel the angst and/or vigour of the frailness of mortality and the nearness of death. Annie was open to this communication; she felt the piece, and she understood something from it, even something of Christian truth. She had an encounter with the transcendent God through the aesthetic experience of the work of art.

Subsequently, a Christian could approach Annie and initiate a conversation about life, mortality and the inevitability of death. Alternatively, this same Christian could have encountered Annie on some other occasion and forthrightly asked her, ‘Where do you think you will go when you die?’ Perhaps he could have cold-called her and asked if she knew the ‘truth’ about Jesus. However, those conversations may not have gotten very far. Instead, the shared participation of *A Thousand Years* offers an affordance to discuss the ‘wow!’ moment Annie had when contemplating the piece. Something had touched her deeply. She was moved profoundly by the piece and had initial questions about the (Christian) themes communicated through the work. Like the Ethiopian eunuch in his chariot reading a passage from the prophet Isaiah, Annie needs a Stephen to help her understand what she is ‘reading.’³⁶⁸

The language of fullness, beyondness, distance or gaps may be actual categorical mistakes - bound by our own limitations - and unable to explain fully, or even accurately, Annie’s encounter with the presence of God. She may not, at first, understand her experience as Augustinian intimacy or Turner’s concept that God is ‘closer to her creaturehood’ than even I am to her as we converse, but this is a place to start. However, through her interaction with *A Thousand Years*, she experienced fullness, a punctuated moment in ordinary life that pointed her to something or someone beyond herself. She experienced something aspirational. That something may indeed have been the presence of the Transcendent God. As Christians, we could now come alongside Annie and provide language and categories for

³⁶⁸ Acts 8:22-40.

what she experienced. In this way, Christians within the artworld can introduce questions of God, or initiate religious dialogue, which can assist secular people on their journey to God.

2) *A Word To Artists Who Are Christian*

Works of art of all types can function as a vehicle for a presentation of the gospel message, either implicitly or explicitly. This study offered *A Thousand Years* by Damien Hirst, *My Bed* by Tracey Emin, and *Cry* and *Memoria* by AAADT as examples of implicit presentations. Hirst wanted his viewers to think about death and mortality and how a person would face this inevitable end of life. Emin showed the world how painful and destructive the wrong kind of relationship can be. These artists are not confessing Christians, yet they invite their viewers to participate in their own existential inquiries of life. Art and works of art need not be ‘Christian art’ in order to present serious Biblical and Christian themes for the viewers to consider.

Both Taylor and Maritain touch upon one important reason for this. Taylor posited that human beings possess an *ineradicable bent* toward the transcendent. People are wired to know God and experience a relationship with him. Something deep within every person, regardless of his or her chosen level of bufferedness, longs for such an experience of God. Because of this, people seek out various non-religious religious experiences. Recording artist Bruce Springsteen sang about a universal longing for authentic human relationship,

Everybody needs a place to rest
Everybody wants to have a home
Don't make no difference what nobody says
Ain't nobody like to be alone

Everybody's got a hungry heart
Everybody's got a hungry heart
Lay down your money and you play your part
Everybody's got a hungry heart³⁶⁹

³⁶⁹ Bruce Springsteen, “Hungry Heart,” Side 2, track number 1, from the album, *The River*, Columbia Records, 1980; <https://www.tripletsandus.com/80s/lyrics/springsteen-hungry.txt.html>.

Since works of art can present an implicit encounter with the gospel, this is a word of exhortation for Christians in the art world who want to be missional in this vocation.

First, of course, artists who are Christian are free to produce works of art with *explicitly* Christian themes or with a very clear presentation of the contents of the gospel message. *Revelations* by AAADT is an example. However, the exhortation is this: Artists, do not attempt to make ‘Christian art.’ This dissertation has intentionally avoided using the term ‘Christian artist’ and has referred rather to ‘artists who are Christian.’ Why is this suggested? Remember that, according to Francis Schaeffer, a ‘Christian artist’ often attempts to take a ‘Christian theme’ and package it into some artistic medium. Schaeffer discouraged this method of artistic creation. He likened this endeavour to reducing works of art to evangelistic tracts. The work then comes across as shallow and more like propaganda than art.³⁷⁰ Rather, following Maritain, artists who are Christian should create art that originates within his or her own subjectivity. What does the artist know and what has he or she experienced of the world, the things of the world, or God? As noted earlier in this dissertation, William Dyrness calls art an ‘encounter of persons.’ Rick Rubin insists that the artist works not for a product that is perfect, but rather for a work that shares the self with the viewer. By participating in works of art created by others, we hear their story. In hearing their story, we may hear our own. Hearing our story, or resonating with an element of the story we hear, is what is alluring about art; the resonances and echoes of shared emotions and experiences.

Creating from the artist’s own subjectivity allows the freedom to share various aspects of life in this world with the viewer. As Rubin also wrote, what is shared through the work of art is who the artist is and what the artist has experienced *at the time the work was created*. Sharing their experiences and knowledge is important for the artist because it provides the freedom to share his or her own subjectivity through various seasons of life. Is the artist in a

³⁷⁰ Francis Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 1973), pg., 54.

good place emotionally or relationally? Then, their art will portray this joy and satisfaction. What if the artist is suffering through a particularly dark or painful time? Then share that. Tracey Emin did. However, many artists, particularly from Evangelical traditions, tend to think that all their work must end on a positive note. They are concerned that they might be asked, 'Where is the redemptive element in the work?' The fear is that they cannot end a work without providing a 'Christian answer' to the problem or suffering presented in the work. After all, this is what all the Psalms do (except Psalm 88). Yet, the artist who is a Christian need not fear. If the artist continues to create, then eventually, a redemptive element will be shown in the work. The artist creates from their own subjectivity; therefore what the artist knows and has experienced in relationship with God will eventually appear through her work. Not every work of art by a Christian must have an *ichthus*.

Limitations and Future Contributions to the topic

This dissertation recognizes that the scope of its vision was limited to its audience. It focused on Taylor's intended audience, the North Atlantic world, as he calls it. Because of this, many other cultures were not included. Taylor recognizes that secularity in part and in various ways extends to other regions and other 'worlds' (SA, 1). However, it is clear today that we need to look at secularization in a different way than simply as a Western phenomenon that is spreading to the rest of the world. Research is beginning to happen in this arena.³⁷¹ A question that could be pursued is, 'Does Taylor's thesis of secularism, particularly *Secularity 3*, apply to non-Western contexts?'

Second, and related to the above question, further study could be conducted to see if Taylor's concepts of fullness and transcendence have any import in non-North Atlantic contexts. Taylor poses the contrast between the pre-modern Enchanted World and the modern Disenchanted World. The result of the disenchanting was the occlusion of the transcendent in Western cultures. Questions that could be pursued include, 'Is this a uniquely Western phenomenon?' 'In what ways, and to what extent, might the non-Western world be *disenchanted*?' 'Does Taylor's notion of *fullness* resonate in non-Western cultures?' 'What questions relating to the good life are other non-Western cultures asking?'

Third, this dissertation focused on Taylor's conclusion, made in 2007, that modern secularism results in the cultural emotion of *malaise*. Research could be conducted on whether or not this holds. It was noted earlier that Mircea Eliade described the cultural

³⁷¹ See: Behera, et. al., "Perspectives from the Global South: Europe the Exceptional Case?" in *Mission in Secularised Contexts of Europe: Contemporary Narratives and Experiences*, ed. by Marina Ngursangzeli Behera, Michael Biehl and Knud Jørgensen, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2018), 195-205; and R. Seed, et. al., Benno van den Toren, Joseph Bosco Bangura, Richard E. Seed, *Is Africa Incurably Religious? Secularization and Discipleship in Africa*, (Fortress Press: 2020).

emotion as *anxiety*.³⁷² However, the contemporary cultural situation in the West is fraught with turmoil: political division, economic hardship, post-colonial and racial issues, environmental issues, war, violence, debates on sexuality, etc. A question that could be pursued is, ‘Is malaise still the primary cultural emotion in Secularity 3?’ If not, what is the cultural emotion?’ Moreover ‘Are we still in Secularity 3? In what sense, then, does Taylor’s Secularity 3 thesis still hold?’

Fourth, the role of art in non-Western cultures *vis-à-vis* experiences of fullness or transcendence could be explored. A related question is, ‘To what extent is a Post-Romantic kind of *expressivism* active in non-Western cultures?’ This dissertation posited that art and the experience of art provided for experiences of fullness precisely because of the Post-Romantic attitudes that characterize the contemporary situation. If this is not the case in other cultures, then does art perform the same role as argued in this research?

Fifth, this research chose the Neo-Thomist concept of humanity as *imago Dei* as the theological bridge between the experience of fullness and art. This was intentional in order to provide a ‘from the ground up’ and *missional* approach and methodology. It was noted that other theological approaches could be pursued. Theological approaches which focus primarily on the agency of God could include, ‘How the Holy Spirit is involved in the experience of fullness/transcendence through art?’ ‘How does God draw a person to himself through an experience of art?’ ‘What is the role of divine illumination?’ ‘What is the role of divine grace?’ ‘How does grace, prevenient or otherwise, operate on a person in this encounter with God?’

Sixth, Charles Taylor has recently published a new book titled, *Cosmic Connections: Poetry in the Age of Disenchantment* (Cambridge MA and London, UK: Belknap, 2024) as I

³⁷² See: Chapter 2, 1.5; Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, 1987).

complete the final draft of this dissertation. The book is a follow-up to *The Language Animal* (2016). The book explores the Romantic uses of symbols in music and poetry. While not the specific intention of this dissertation, it is likely that Taylor has ideas that would add to this work.

Appendix

The Failure to Adequately Define Art in the 20th Century: The Need For Maritain

One of the crucial voices in this dissertation is that of philosopher Jacques Maritain. Maritain was chosen as a dialogue partner because of his unique theory of art. According to Maritain, art is an internal disposition, a *virtue* of the Practical Intellect, which is a faculty possessed by all artists. Therefore, art is an interior reality that enables the artist to draw from his or her own subjectivity, i.e., what he or she knows intuitively through experiencing the world, the things of the world, and even God. This intuitive knowledge is then communicated through *works of art*. In this way, Maritain's views offer a way to understand works of art, even though he does not offer a definition. Maritain begins and ends art in the interiority of the artist and the viewer of art. It is Maritain's emphasis on the interiority of art that explains how aesthetic experiences of works of art can provide the medium for an interior experience of fullness. Maritain's theory offers an aesthetic answer to the question, 'Can art be a medium for the experience of fullness?'

Maritain's theory allows us to go beyond Taylor's philosophical notion of the experience of fullness and offers an explanation of how the aesthetic experience of works of art can be a medium for an experience of transcendence. Again, it is Maritain's perspective of the interiority of art. This was demonstrated in Chapter Five of this dissertation. This section highlights the need for Maritain as we attempt to answer the research question. This section will demonstrate the insufficiency of the modern attempts to define art by focusing on the object itself, the object on the wall or in the gallery. Such a focus does not afford an explanation for the effect of works of art in the inner world of a viewer of art.

1 The 20th-Century Question: Can Art Be Defined?

1.1 Insufficiency of Classical Definitions

‘What is art?’ This question has posed significant difficulties for artists, art critics, lovers of art and philosophers of art for a long time. Perhaps the question gained its most significant status for debate during the 20th Century. New art, art movements and art ideas appeared seemingly every decade, making it nearly impossible to provide an answer to this question. The fact that it is even being asked today and vigorously debated by artists, critics, art philosophers and art lovers with still no consensus may be an indication of the depth of the dilemma.

The objective of the chapter is to briefly examine the primary attempts at providing a definition of art that occurred in the last century. What will be demonstrated is that a definition regarding what constitutes a work of art could possibly be achieved. However, this definition will still prove inadequate in the discourse relative to answering Taylor’s question of fullness. The chapter will proceed by presenting the important personalities and the theories put forward by them.

It must be stressed that this chapter is by no means exhaustive in examining these ideas. It is hoped that the readers will obtain at least a cursory understanding of the issues at stake and how they relate to the discussion of the definition of art. The chapter will conclude that another definition of art and works of art is necessary if art is to function as a medium for the experience of fullness. The current understanding of art does not sufficiently answer the question of fullness. Therefore, I maintain that a more adequate definition of art is offered by philosopher Jacques Maritain.

With the rise of avant-garde art, a seemingly innumerable assortment of artefacts, productions, installations and pieces were put forward by artists to be considered as works of art. The traditional definitions and understanding of art were being challenged. New

definitions and theories arose and quickly multiplied. Thus, the attempt to obtain and articulate a satisfactory definition of art became a fluid and ever-changing enterprise. Some critics and philosophers even claimed that art was undefinable. Morris Wietz declared in his 1956 essay ‘The Role of Theory in Aesthetics’ that art was an ‘open concept.’ The concept of art is so open that it defied definition.

However, saying that art is undefinable was an insufficient conclusion. If we cannot *define* art, then we may not be able to *identify* art. As Noël Carroll observes, ‘Identifying whether something should be classified as art or not is crucial to ascertaining how we should respond to it. Should we attempt to interpret it? Should we explore it for aesthetic properties? Should we try to fathom its design?’³⁷³

Perhaps you observe a family arguing. The situation is tense, and the argument gets very heated. If the family are your friends and you are observing their behaviour in their home, you might be anxious and want to intervene. However, if you are in a theatre and observe this same scene, you might react differently.



20. Scene from *If These Walls Could Talk* (2018)

Suppose you came across a stuffed Angora goat wrapped in an old tire, with assorted bits of what appear to be garbage surrounding it. If you find this in your neighbour’s garage,

³⁷³ Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction*, (London: Routledge, 1999), pg., 208.

you may offer to help him tidy up. However, if you observed these same items at the Tate Gallery in London, you would not seek to tidy up. You would most likely be escorted from the building if you tried.



21. *Monogram* by Robert Rauschenberg (1955-1959)

Defining and identifying art is a significant enterprise because if something is presented as art, then we, the observers, are asked to contemplate and interpret the piece as a ‘work of art.’ We no longer seek to clean up a mess or stop an argument. Instead, we ask questions such as, ‘What does this mean?’ ‘How does this make me feel?’ ‘What is this trying to communicate?’

The definitions of art in classical discourse usually attempt to define art according to one central characteristic or property: representational properties, expressive properties and formal properties. Plato and Aristotle’s view of art as *mimesis* is an example of the representational definition of art. Something was an artwork if it was an imitation or representation of something else. For example, a painter or a sculptor would attempt to produce a likeness of a person, an event or an object. Since the beginning of the twentieth

century, this theory has been seriously challenged by abstract art, conceptual art, and avant-garde art, which do not always seek to imitate anything.

In the West during the eighteenth century the movement known as Romanticism shifted the focus of art to *expression*. The necessary condition for art was now that ‘artwork x’ needed to express the emotions of the artist. Artists were no longer constrained to make art that simply ‘hold a mirror’ to objects and portray them accurately. The artist may paint a landscape, but the critical condition of the work now is that the artist has an emotional experience with that landscape. The artwork itself must then exhibit the artist’s emotion.

An example of Art as Expression as a theory of art was advocated by Leo Tolstoy in his book, *What is Art?* (1899). For Tolstoy, art is the sharing of emotions.³⁷⁴

Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings and also experience them.

Tolstoy held this because he thought the experience of art could create empathy among people, ultimately creating harmony in society. Antonis Chaliakopoulos describes it thus,³⁷⁵

He believes that art is a means of communicating emotion, with the aim of promoting mutual understanding. By gaining awareness of each other’s feelings we can successfully practice empathy and ultimately unite to further mankind’s collective well-being.

The difficulty with this theory is that it is impossible for a work of art to contain the artist’s emotions, nor is it possible to guarantee that the audience will feel the same emotions as the artist. It also cannot be said that the property of expression is characteristic of all art, or only art. Expression was deemed neither necessary nor sufficient as a characteristic of art (Tolstoy, 1897; Collingwood, 1938; Langer, 1953; Carroll, 1999).

Clive Bell introduced *formalism* into the discourse of the definition of art.³⁷⁶ Although primarily focused on painting, *formalism* could be applied to any accepted art form.

³⁷⁴ Leo Tolstoy, *What Is Art?* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1904), pg. 50.

³⁷⁵ Antonis Chaliakopoulos, “‘Without Art Mankind Could Not Exist’: Leo Tolstoy’s Essay What is Art,’ *The Collector*, 3 July, 2020, <https://www.thecollector.com/leo-tolstoy-what-is-art/>; accessed 13 July, 2021.

³⁷⁶ Clive Bell, *Art*, 4th edition, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1920).

Formalism argues that x is an artwork if it is designed to possess and exhibit *significant form*. In other words, it is required that a work of art show an arrangement of lines, colours, shapes, volumes, and/or spaces. Music, dance, architecture, and literature certainly qualify. Bell considered this a superior theory because representation and expression are not necessary, although these may be happy accidents of the work in question. What mattered was form. The objection to art being defined as possessing significant form is that there exist works accepted as art that possess no form, such as composer John Cage's piece *4'33''*.

The classical definitions of art, art as imitation, art as expression and art as form, are seen as insufficient as complete or satisfactory definitions. So, is it true that art is undefinable?

1.2 *Morris Weitz*

As mentioned above, a crucial moment in the discourse regarding the definition of art was an essay by Morris Weitz in 1956.³⁷⁷ As the title of the essay suggests, Weitz affirms that theory is the preoccupation of the philosophy of art. The primary concern is determining the nature of art so that a definition of art may be produced. What theories of art are looking for are the necessary and sufficient properties of art, and thus a way to define art and distinguish art from everything else, or non-art. The importance of an inquiry of this nature is that we need to know what art is to be able to respond correctly to it or explain why some art is good and better than other art.

His question is 'Is aesthetic theory, in the sense of a true definition or set of necessary and sufficient properties of art, possible?' Weitz doubts that it is possible, because since Plato, a consensus of a suitable definition has not emerged. If art has a definition, why is

³⁷⁷ Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Sept. 1956), pgs. 27-35.

there no agreement? Therefore, Weitz suggests that the enterprise should be abandoned and that the question of ‘What is the nature of art?’ should be dismissed and replaced with other, more pertinent questions.

Weitz summarises several aesthetic theories and demonstrates the weaknesses of each: the Formalist theory of Bell and Fry, the Emotionalist theory of Tolstoy, the Intuitionist theory of Croce, the Organicist theory of Bradley, and the Voluntarist theory of Parker. The Formalist and Emotionalist theories were examined above. The Intuitionist theory identifies art not as a physical artefact but as a ‘specific creative, cognitive and spiritual act. Art is a first stage of knowledge in which certain human beings (artists) bring their images and intuitions into lyrical clarification or expression.’

The Organicist theory defines a *work* of art as an organic unity of interrelated parts. In other words, the artist brings various, dissimilar and possibly contrary components into a single, unified and organic whole.

The Voluntarist theory says that art must be defined as a complex of characteristics. Art must bring together three components: 1) the embodiment of wishes and desires of the artist imaginatively satisfied; 2) language; and 3) harmony. Weitz rejects these theories as being either too vague or too general, or they include objects that are not art. In addition, none are empirically verifiable.

Having briefly reviewed the above theories, Weitz advances his theory of art: that art is not a closed concept but an open one. He writes,³⁷⁸

If we actually look and see what it is that we call art, we will find no common properties - only strands of similarities... Art itself is an open concept. New conditions (cases has constantly arisen and will doubtless constantly arise: new art forms, movements, will emerge)... Aestheticians may lay down similarity conditions but never necessary and sufficient ones for the correct application of the concept.

³⁷⁸ Morris Weitz, ‘The Role of Theory in Aesthetics,’ *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1956, vol. 15, no. 1, pg. 27.

Thus, according to Weitz, it is impossible to determine or to define the necessary and sufficient properties of art, as these *cannot* be defined. Thus, Weitz argues that the first thing necessary in aesthetics is to discover and articulate how we use the concept of art.

Weitz, a Neo-Wittgensteinian, will follow the model employed by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his book *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). Wittgenstein uses the illustration of ‘games.’ All games have similarities, but there is no one thing that is common to all games. There exists no common trait. There exists no necessary and sufficient property that all games possess. There does exist, however, ‘family resemblances’ (Weitz, 1956, pgs. 66-67). In other words, we can intuitively recognize games or a game, even if we do not possess an accurate definition of ‘games.’ From the ability to recognize the ‘family resemblance,’ we could decide which new activity we could classify as a ‘game.’ For Weitz, this degree of knowledge of games is all we know or need to know about ‘games.’ This analysis is then applied to works of art.³⁷⁹

Art, therefore, being similar to ‘games’ is an open concept. The concept of art could be revised, expanded or extended should we decide that some new form needs to be included as ‘art.’ Art would be a closed concept if necessary and sufficient conditions could be determined. But this cannot be since new cases, forms and movements of art are consistently emerging over time. We could, Weitz argues, choose to close the concept of the arts, but that would ‘foreclose on the very conditions of creativity in the arts.’ In other words, if we decide

³⁷⁹ William Kennick follows Wittgenstein’s theory in his analogy of a warehouse. Imagine there exists an immense warehouse filled ‘all sorts of things’ - works of fine art of all varieties, plus ordinary items like tools, rocks clothing, postage stamps, etc. An individual with no real artistic or aesthetic acumen is instructed to remove from the warehouse all works of art. Kennick assumes that the individual, intuitively, will be able to bring out proper works of art. He makes a comparison to St. Augustine’s claim that we know what time is and how to identify it when he writes, ‘We know what art is when no one asks us what it is; that is, we know quite well how to use the word “art” and the phrase “work of art” correctly.’ However, at the same time, we are at a loss to produce any formula, simple or complex, that can explain *why* we know this. See: Kennick, William E. “Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?” *Mind*, vol. 67, no. 267, 1958, pp. 321-322.

on a normative definition of art, this will exclude and eliminate the creative thinking and action that characterizes the arts.

Weitz's solution is to clarify how we employ the concept of art. He suggests two methods: the *descriptive* and the *evaluative*. The descriptive use of the concept of art employs 'the criteria of recognition.' We recognize that certain conditions are present: some sort of artefact made by human skill, which consists of some medium – stone, wood, sounds, canvas, or other such materials. If none of these conditions exist in an object, we cannot call it a work of art. We cannot define x as an artwork if x is not an artefact, or if it is not a product of human skill, or has no observable criteria of recognition. However, for Weitz, 'None of the criteria of recognition is a defining one, either necessary or sufficient, because we can sometimes assert of something that it is a work of art and go on to deny any one of these conditions, even the one which has traditionally been taken to be basic, namely, that of an artefact.' In other words, we will find the criteria of recognition for objects we call art, but none of these conditions are necessary or sufficient. Moreover, while none of the criteria of recognition is necessary and sufficient, yet as more similarities are found in the new object under investigation, the more the 'family resemblance' shows itself, the more likely we are to classify the new work an artwork.

The evaluative concept of a 'work of art' is for the purpose of praise. This use of the concept is employed when we observe the presence of aesthetic excellence or the 'successful harmonization of elements' in a work. This is an 'honorific' definition that should not be mistaken, as it often is, for a descriptive evaluation or definition.

Two factors provide a strong case for the acceptance of Weitz's Neo-Wittgensteinianism: 1) it gives us a possible explanation for how to identify art. It also offers a way to identify non-art; and 2) the open concept provides the space for ever-expanding possibilities for innovation for new art, new forms of art and new artistic expression. All one

needs to produce is enough ‘family resemblance’ to what everyone already implicitly identifies as art, and new art can be made.

Perhaps this is why Neo-Wittgensteinianism was the prevailing theory of art throughout the 1950s and 1960s (Carroll, 1999, pg. 215).

1.3 Noël Carroll Responds to the Neo-Wittgensteinianism

Neo-Wittgensteinianism holds the position that art cannot be defined, e.g., no necessary and sufficient conditions for what counts as an artwork, and that art is an open, expansive concept. Carroll argues that the Neo-Wittgensteinian can only hold this view by confusing *artwork* with the *practice* of art-making. However, Carroll notes that this view is a confusion of categories. It is illogical to say that an artwork must be ever-open to change, innovation or expansion. The artwork is what it is. However, the *practice* of art making can be said to be ever-open to change, innovation or expansion. It is not inconceivable that artwork can have necessary and sufficient conditions that allow for definition and that the practice of art-making is an open concept (Carroll, 1999, pg 218-219). The Neo-Wittgensteinian worry is that ‘by defining art, philosophers are trying (supposedly) to legislate what artists can do’ (Carroll, 1999, pg. 220). Carroll reasons that, in principle, defining art poses no barrier to ‘artistic innovation’ (Carroll, 1999, pg. 221).

Is the ‘family resemblance’ approach truly tenable? While the concept of the *practice* of art may be open, it is not infinitely open. Not everything at any time for any reason is art. Carroll points out that everything or every object somehow resembles something else. A snow shovel may resemble the moon in that both have accumulated dust on them. From this logic, anything *would* be art because a person could find some resemblance to an existing artwork. Whereas having a necessary and sufficient set of conditions for defining art still allows, in principle, that anything could be art under the right conditions and for the right

reasons. Having the necessary and sufficient conditions for an object to be an artwork still allows for incredible latitude and creativity in the kinds of things that can be art.

Innovations, expansions and changes in the practices of the arts must be just that, e.g., *modifications* in recognizable practices. If the new ‘practice’ of art was not connected in some way to its predecessors, then no one would recognize it as a practice of art. Feeding your pet dog in your kitchen, even out of a fine china bowl, would not be recognized as the practice of art. It has no predecessor.

The argument that art cannot be defined, according to Weitz and the Neo-Wittgensteinian position appears not convincing. They may have confused the categories of *artwork* with the *practice of art*. The open concept is then *too open*. Innovations to the *practice of art* must be innovations of recognized practices. So, in principle, we may be able to find a suitable definition of art. To this we now turn.

2 Definitions of Art: Major Personalities

2.1 Institutional Theory of Art: George Dickie

The foundation for George Dickie’s theory, the Institutional Theory, is found in the earlier work of philosopher Arthur Danto’s 1964 Essay, *The Artworld*.³⁸⁰ Danto coined the term when espousing his theory about why Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Box* was art while actual Brillo boxes were not. Danto was exploring the question, What differentiates artworks with no perceptual, physical differences from ordinary everyday items? For example, what makes Duchamp’s snow shovel (*In Advance of a Broken Arm*) an artwork, while all the millions of other snow shovels are not? He posited that the difference is *theory*, a theory ‘that takes it [an ordinary object] up into the artworld.’ Danto will be discussed in greater detail below.

³⁸⁰ Arthur Danto, “The Artworld,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 61, No. 19, (Oct. 15, 1964), pp. 571-584.



22. *In Advance of a Broken Arm* (1915)

Dickie, building on Danto's foundation, explained his theory in a 1969 article entitled *Defining Art*.³⁸¹ Dickie begins the article by reviewing Weitz. Weitz argues that no necessary and sufficient conditions exist by which an artefact should be classified as an artwork. *Being an artefact* is not even necessary for Weitz. Dickie critiques Weitz for confusing the categories of the *descriptive* concept of art with the *evaluative* (253). He then argues for the characteristic of *artefactuality* as a minimum necessary condition for art. According to Dickie, Weitz has misunderstood the *evaluative* concept of art altogether, then moves on to a discussion of the controversial *descriptive* concept. It is here that Dickie explains his theory.

Dickie's first move is to refer back to Danto. To see *Brillo Box*, one must view the artefact from the perspective of an 'artworld.' From this Dickie gives his definition of art: '*A work of art in the descriptive sense is (1) an artefact (2) upon which some society or sub-group of a society has conferred the status of candidate for appreciation*' (254, italics original). Therein lies Dickie's unique contribution. The definition includes several ideas that

³⁸¹ George Dickie, "Defining Art," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 3, (July, 1969), pp. 253-256.

must be clarified. How do they ‘confer status?’ What does a ‘candidate for appreciation’ mean? What does ‘appreciation’ entail? Who is this ‘society’ or sub-group of a society?

First, the definition states that the work of art must be an artefact. It must be the product of human effort and labour. Human effort or labour allows for a wide variety of entities or objects to be considered. The degree to which the artist laboured is not the primary point. Michelangelo spent considerably more time producing the *Pietà* than Duchamp did producing *In Advance of a Broken Arm*. Human effort simply needs to be demonstrated. The condition of *artefactuality* also includes that the work must be ‘publicly accessible’ (Carroll, 1999). There must be something upon which a human being expends effort to produce that the public can see.

Next, the definition of the ‘status’ of *candidate* must be ‘conferred.’ An artefact hanging on the wall in an art gallery or a piece performed at a theatre is evidence that status as a candidate for appreciation has been conferred. In other words, someone, usually the artist, produces an artefact and then puts the work forward for the public to see and ‘appreciate.’ A museum curator, an art critic, or a distributor can also confer status. A qualified person, acting on behalf of the artworld can display the piece and say, ‘This is a candidate for appreciation.’

What kind of appreciation does Dickie have in mind? The kind of appreciation we generally give in our experiences of paintings, poetry, novels, and dance. Appreciation is not saying whether or not we ‘like’ the artwork. Appreciation of art is coming to an understanding of the piece; it is sizing up the artwork to discern the elements of its composition, its form and its content. Appreciation involves understanding why the artist made the formal and compositional choices that she did, and how those elements work together to communicate the purpose of the work (Dickie, 1969, pg. 255).

Who is the 'society or sub-group of a society' that can confer status? As mentioned above, this can be the artist, a curator, a critic or distributor of art. These people are considered the authoritative 'experts' of the artworld due to their knowledge, understanding and experience (Carroll, 1999, pg. 229). The person qualified to act on behalf of the artworld understands the artworld's history, theories and practices. These qualities are gained through study, practice and experience. An artefact, a work of art, is put forward by the right people for the right reasons. No less is expected in any other arena that requires expertise: law, science, medicine.

The Institutional theory has several strengths. First, it is quite liberal in the various kinds of things that *can* be art. Not that everything is art, but anything can *become* art if status is conferred by the right people for the right reasons. However, the Institutional theory also possesses the means to declare that a candidate for appreciation is not art. The Neo-Wittgensteinian concern that artistic creativity will be hindered by the existence of necessary and sufficient conditions is eliminated.

Second, the theory holds that to be a spokesperson on behalf of the artworld a person must be qualified. The Institutional theory requires that a person, or persons, have the necessary knowledge, understanding, and experience of art. How a person arrives at that knowledge is not as difficult as it may seem. However, simply voicing an opinion in a private internet blog is insufficient to qualify a person as a critic.

The Institutional theory makes room for art usually deemed to be in bad taste. In the Representation/Imitation theory, Expression theory and Formal theory it is implied that 'x is an artwork' if x is a *quality* artwork. Portraying its subject *well*, eliciting the *proper* emotions and exhibiting *significant* form can all imply that the artefact possesses a degree of quality. Since the definition of art, according to the Institutional theory, is not based on the physical or visible attributes of the work, then the work need not represent or imitate its subject well at

all. However, the ‘Institution’ may still confer the status of *candidate for* appreciation. The audience may conclude, however, that the performance or artefact is, in fact, *unworthy* of appreciation. It may be *bad* art. Similarly, the Institutional theory can exclude works from the classification of ‘artwork.’ Simply because a lone man uploads visual footage on the internet of himself submerged in baked beans and declares that he has made art does not make it so.



23. *Submerged in Beans*

Third, there exists a ‘social context’ in the Institutional theory. Noël Carroll writes, ‘The Institutional theory emphasizes that there is a social practice with rules and designated roles underpinning the presentation of such things and the instantiation of these social forms and relations in the required way is crucial to art status’ (Carroll, 1999, pg. 232). With the social practice and social context in place, the bean-consuming YouTube-er has not (yet) made art.

The Institutional theory also has several weaknesses. A criticism levelled against the theory is that ‘the artworld’ is not, in fact, an ‘institution’ - like the Catholic Church or the organization of lawyers known as the Bar Association. Nor is there a certification process within the artworld comparable to a person appointed to the office of bishop or a lawyer. Nor

are there formal rules and procedures or levels and positions of authority normally expected of institutions. Given the level of informality, is it appropriate to call the artworld an ‘institution’?

Second, does the Institutional theory not allow for art to be created outside the societal context? The example of the lone tribesman (Neolithic by Carroll³⁸² or Amazon by Levinson³⁸³) who, while away from his tribe, gathers and stacks some coloured stones or rocks. He may or may not have had a pleasurable aesthetic experience. Did the lone tribesman create art? A series of questions follow the argument: Did he intend to ‘make’ art? Did he know what he was doing, or was this a spontaneous art-making event? Did he intend for the next passer-by to see and enjoy his creation? Did he intend some aesthetic function? The questions are intended to recall and apply necessary and sufficient conditions from previous theories. The point of the hypothetical tribesman is that if a person argues that he did not make art because the answers given to the previous questions were ‘No,’ then the Institutional theory could stand. Moreover, if one agrees that the lone tribesman did make art, then the Institutional theory is disproved by this scenario.

2.2 Defining Art Historically: Jerrold Levinson

A significant critique of the Danto/Dickie Institutional theory came from Jerrold Levinson. Levinson’s questions are: What is the artness of an artwork? Wherein does it reside? What is it that ties together all the great works we call art? Levinson deals with the Institutional theory before proceeding to his own. He proposes that the ‘crucial idea’ for ‘artworkhood’ is not something intrinsic in the object itself. What is most important for artworkhood is a reference to the history of art – as opposed to inclusion in an ambiguous

³⁸² Carroll, pg., 236.

³⁸³ Jerrold Levinson, “Defining Art Historically,” *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 19, No. 3, (1979), pp. 233.

artworld. Levinson argues that the way to determine what art is, or what constitutes an artwork, is to look backwards into art history to compare the current object with objects or artefacts previously regarded as artworks. The ‘regard-as-a-work-of-art’ concept will replace ‘the institution’ of the Institutional theory (Levinson, 1979, pg. 232).

Levinson remarks on what he sees to be two major difficulties of the Institutional theory (Levinson, 1979, pg. 233-234). First, he questions the implication that artmaking must involve ‘cultural performance.’ There need not be a third party (the institution) to perform the rite of recognition that something is art. Artmaking does not require a social context. However, Levinson assumes that artmakers typically make art with the society of art consumers in mind. Here, Levinson proposes the hypothetical lone Amazon Indian who arranged coloured stones, with no consideration for who might notice or care. He inquires, ‘May this not be art?’ The weakness of the Institutional theory relative to this scenario is that there is no room for private art. The ‘institutional theory comes close to conflating art and *self-conscious art*, art and *socially situated art*, art and *declared art*.’ As with the Neo-Wittgensteinians, the Institutional theory may confuse categories.

The second and primary problem Levinson finds with the Institutional theory is the lack of any specific notion of what is meant by ‘appreciation.’ It is unclear what the art-maker should expect the audience to do with her work. In Levinson’s opinion, a better way to determine an adequate definition is to ‘specify what the art object must be *intended for*, what sort of regard the spectator must be asked to extend to the object.’ The difficulty, the ‘trick,’ is to do this without resorting to ‘fixed characteristics (e.g., with full intention, contemplatively, giving special notice to appearance, with emotional openness)’ – without attempting to locate a ‘single unitary aesthetic attitude’ (Levinson, 1979, pg. 233-234).

Levinson now proposes his definition: ‘*a work of art is a thing intended for regard-as-a-work-of-art: regard in any of the ways works of art existing prior to it have been*

correctly regarded' (Levinson, 1979, pg. 234, italics original). The point is to explicate the current art object with reference to what art objects were accepted from the past. In other words, the way we know if something is art now is because it is related to what we know as art in the recent past. We know what art was in the recent past because we know what art was in the distant past. Levinson writes, 'What I am saying is that ultimately the concept of art has no content beyond what art *has been*' (Levinson, 1979, pg. 234).

Art regards from the past include regarding an object or artefact as an expression of feeling, as an imitation or representation of something else, as possessing significant form, presenting an object or artefact for contemplation or beauty, addressing a cultural idea or societal concern. If the artist makes art with the intention that her work be regarded, in one or more ways, in the same regards as listed, then she has made art. The intention of the artmakers is crucial for the Historical Definition of art.

Levinson considers the case of 'art-aware art-makers' (Levinson, 1979, pg. 235). This is the event of an artmaker creating art that intentionally connects her creation to the concept of art, the body of artworks that preceded her. The artist is consciously aware of what she is doing and thus is making art. There exist three ways in which this connection can be made: (1) by making something that will be physically and externally similar to previous artworks; (2) by making something that is intended to give the same kind of experience or pleasure as previous art works; and (3) making something intended for regard as previous artworks have been regarded.

Levinson dismisses the first two options. Option 1 is rejected because external similarity, or likeness, to previous artworks, is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for being an artwork. Option 2 is rejected because this emphasises the passive results of experiencing art. It is more reasonable, Levinson suggests, that the artist is more concerned with what spectators will *do* with the art than what they will get out of the artwork.

A fuller articulation of Levinson's theory is formulated thus (Levinson, 1979, pg. 236):

X is a work of art = X is an object which a person or persons, having the appropriate proprietary right over X, non-passingly intends for regard-as-a-work-of-art, i.e., regard in any way (or ways) in which prior art works are or were correctly (or standardly) regarded.

Some definitions are necessary. The condition 'intends for' has two aspects. First, an object must exist. *Artefactuality* is a necessary condition in the Historical definition. The artist needed to make the object, thus Duchamp and his 'ready-mades' could be included as artworks. Levinson explains, 'This is to be understood as short for "makes, appropriates or conceives of," so as to comprehend fashioned, found and conceptual art.' Second, *intentionality* is also a necessary condition. No one makes art without the intention to make art. This may seem to contradict the scenario of our lone Amazon Indian stone-stacker. The question posed was, 'Did he make art?' While Levinson could argue that the Institutional theory denies he made art, the Historical definition allows that he did. All that is needed, minimally, is the Amazon Indian stone-stacker who *intended* that his stone pile creation be visually pleasing. Creating objects that are regarded as visually pleasing is an historically accepted regard-as-a-work-of-art. He may have also had another art regard in mind. He may have intended his stone pile creation as an expression of his feelings or emotions, or he may have intended that the person who finds his creation contemplate it. As long as the Amazon Indian intended that his stone pile be regarded in a way other art has been regarded, then he made art.

Next, the art-makers must have fashioned, found or conceived of her work 'non-passingly.' In other words, the work is not to be done 'in passing' or without care that it lasts. The artist should not quickly throw something together, almost haphazardly, and not care if it exists tomorrow. A level of seriousness of intention and production of the work is required. A

child's paper aeroplane is not art. Creation 'non-passingly' is also a necessary condition for an object to be art.

The artist must also have a 'proprietary right over X' (Levinson, 1979, pg. 237). In other words, the artist must own or be in control over X. Marcel Duchamp appropriated a urinal which he did not make, submitted it in an art exhibition (*Fountain*), and it was eventually considered art. Duchamp had the 'proprietary right' over the urinal. This condition limits the possibilities of found objects being considered art. Duchamp also declared the Woolworth building in New York City to be a work of art (January 1916). Although Duchamp intended the Woolworth building to be art, the Historical Definition would reject this claim because Duchamp did not own the building. Levinson also recognizes the difficulty the proprietary-right condition poses when curators, promoters, and exhibitors 'turn non-art items from the past into art objects of the present.' This happens when a curator, for example, displays an object from an ancient culture and declares it to be art. However, upon investigation, the object was never art in the culture of origin. The object is then removed from the display. Did the object return to its ancient non-art status? Levinson argues that the object was never art in the first place because the modern curator unknowingly lacked the right to declare the object art.

Regarding the crucial condition of the artist's intention, Levinson poses three kinds of intentions that qualify as intentions for regard-as-a-work-of-art. The first is the *specific art-conscious* intention. This intention is for the new work to be regarded in a *specific* way or in ways that 'artworks' were correctly regarded in the past. For example, the new object is explicitly intended to be regarded as an expression of the artist. The second is the *non-specific art-conscious intention*. This intention does not demand new works of any *particular* art regard from the past. Any of them will suffice. The third is the *art-unconscious* intention (Levinson, 1997, pg. 238). An example could be a person who makes a work with the

intention that the object has an acceptable art regard, even though the maker is entirely unaware that his intended art regard *happens to be* an acceptable art regard. This allows art makers to make art even though they have no idea that what they are making could qualify as art. The Amazon Indian is an example of this third intention.

There are several strengths of the Historical Definition of art.

First, an artefact is a necessary condition of art. This seems an assumed reality for art lovers. Art must give a person something to view, hold, or appreciate. Therefore, performances in dance and theatre qualify as art. Most people speak about a *thing* or an object, when they discuss art.

Second, the intention of the art makers is required. Artists do not accidentally make art. The *art-unconscious* intention provides for this. The artist has a proper art regard in mind when she creates, fashions or appropriates her object. She did not realize that what she intended was an art regard. However, the artist did have an intention. She did not spill coffee and call it art.

Third, the necessary and sufficient conditions for what qualifies as an artwork are not dependent on the object's physical characteristics. The Historical Definition of art bypasses the controversial and failed disputes about the necessary and sufficient conditions of the other theories.

Fourth, no third-party art authorities are necessary to confer status upon an object. These have been replaced by a history of what we know about art.

Finally, the possibilities for new and innovative art remain. Art history has much to draw from. Defining art is a matter of looking backwards, not forwards, or to intrinsic properties that have, even until now, remained elusive and unidentifiable.

There are several areas for improvement in the Historical Definition of art.

First, the definition is circular. It requires that we look back to previous works of art to identify present works of art. However, does that not suppose that a definition of art exists already? How is it known what art was in the recent past? Or the distant past? At some point in the past, it was decided that ‘Art is...’ based on criteria other than past artworks. To suggest that past artworks give a clue to present artworks is to say we know with some degree of certainty what artworks were in the past. This appears circular. To what art regard do we point to argue that Mr. Duchamp’s *Fountain* has that same art regard?³⁸⁴

Second, is the Historical Definition too broad? All a person needs to do is declare that she intended to produce something visually pleasing for it to be considered art. Suppose Mary non-passingly and meticulously tends to her rose garden. She intends it to be visually pleasing. Suppose she succeeds. Is her rose garden a work of art? Is her neighbour’s rose garden also meticulously attended to but not intended to be regarded as visually pleasing, or is it also a work of art under the *art-unconscious* intention? Does this make every rose garden a work of art?

2.3 Arthur Danto and The Artworld

It could be argued that the philosophical search for the definition of art began in earnest in 1964 with the publication of Arthur Danto’s essay, ‘The Artworld.’³⁸⁵ The twentieth century witnessed the rise of the kind of artwork that challenged the traditional formulations and definitions of art. Beginning with Dada, moving through Marcel Duchamp,

³⁸⁴ Graham Oppy, “On Defining Art Historically,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 32, (1992), pg. 5. This concept on ‘looking backwards’ was Graham Oppy’s primary criticism of Levinson’s theory. He writes, ‘The final difficulty for Levinson’s definition which I wish to discuss concerns his insistence that art is *necessarily backward-looking*. We have already seen that there seem to be intuitively acceptable counter-examples to this claim. However, I now wish to argue that Levinson’s definition requires that the concept of art developed in a way which is almost certainly contrary to the facts. Levinson’s view seems to be that there must be parallel development of art and the concept of art. Since an art-aware art-maker is one who forms the intention that certain objects are to be regarded in ways that works of art have hitherto been correctly regarded, it seems that an art-aware art-maker must have the concept of a work of art.’

³⁸⁵ Arthur Danto, “The Artworld,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 61, No. 19, (Oct. 15, 1964), pp. 571-584.

past Jackson Pollock, Robert Rauschenberg and John Cage, the boundaries of art were ever-expanding. The search for adequate definitions and philosophies of what art is has struggled to keep pace. It reached a momentary climax with Arthur Danto.

Danto was fascinated by Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box*. *Brillo Box* is a sculpture created by Warhol – 24 plywood boxes that looked identical to the ordinary cardboard boxes in which Brillo pads were shipped. This dissertation noted *Brillo Box* in Chapter One. What fascinated Danto was how Warhol's *Brillo Box* could be art when its 'indiscernible' counterpart, *actual* Brillo boxes were not. It was not even a question, at the time, of whether *Brillo Box* was 'bad' art or perhaps kitsch. The question was how this could be considered art *at all*. The standard definitions for art simply had no 'box' for *Brillo Box*. For Danto, the answer was clear that a new theory of art was required (Danto, 1964, pg. 581).

Danto explains his theory in 'The Artworld.' Part of the dilemma, as Danto saw it, was not that current art theory could not differentiate art from 'real things'; the dilemma was how is it that 'real things' could now be art? And how is it that objects that are indiscernible from real things are art, when the real thing is not? Robert Rauschenberg took his bed, painted it with streaks of old house paint and then hung it on the wall (Danto, 1964, pg. 575). He called the work, *Bed*. This was not a representation of a bed painted on a flat canvas. It was a real bed. A person could sleep in it (assuming they took it off the wall first, of course). Marcel Duchamp's urinal may be the artwork entitled *Fountain*, but it is, in fact, a urinal.

First, using Rauschenberg's bed as an example, Danto explains, 'To mistake an artwork for a real object is no great feat when the artwork is the real object one mistakes it for' (Danto, 1964, pg. 575). In other words, the artwork, *A*, is constituted by a real bed, *R*, with paint streaks, *P*, on it. But the *work*, *A*, is not a bed with paint streaks on it. The work is a painted bed, *Bed*. When an observer is asked to identify what it is that they see and what *is* 'it' that they are observing, they might say, 'I see a bed, *R*, with paint, *P* on it.' Danto is

sympathetic to the viewer but points out that they are both right and wrong. At one level, yes, they are looking at a bed with paint streaks on it. But at another level, an artistic level, they should see ‘beyond’ *R* and *P* to see, *Bed*. It is the *is* that must be defined.

Danto calls this the ‘*is of artistic identification*’ (Danto, 1964, pg. 576).³⁸⁶ It is as if a child draws a circle and a triangle. He points to the triangle and says, ‘That is me.’ It is, and it isn’t. He then says of the circle, ‘That is my sister.’ Again, it is, and it isn’t. What is literally on the page is a triangle and a circle. But the triangle *is* the boy, and the circle *is* his sister at the artistic level, with an artistic definition. It is *artistically* true, even though *literally* false. There is no difficulty with the ‘*is of artistic identification*’ if we are referring to a painting, a representation on a canvas, of Pope John Paul II, and we say, ‘This is John Paul II.’ It is, and it isn’t. But in this case, we know we are looking at a flat, two-dimensional *representation* of John Paul II. But what if we are looking at a real bed, *R*, with paint streaks on it, *P*? What *is* it? The ‘*is of artistic identification*’ says it ‘is’ *Bed*. It is a theory of art or aesthetics, that is in play here. Without understanding this theory, according to Danto, a person will only ever ‘see’ triangles and circles and a bed with paint streaks. Interpretations depend on *artistic* identifications; these are employed to properly identify the ‘parts and properties’ of the object, i.e., the boundaries of the work, that transfigure the object into an artwork.³⁸⁷

‘To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld.’ In light of this, Danto concludes (Danto, 1964, pg. 581),

What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo box a work of art consisting of a Brillo Box is a certain theory of art. It is a theory of art that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real object that it is (in a sense of *is* other than that of artistic identification).

³⁸⁶ See also: Danto, “The Artworld,” pg. 579, and: Danto, ‘Appreciation and Interpretation,’ *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement Of Art*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pg. 41.

³⁸⁷ *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pg. 41-42.

This theory, this artworld, requires a considerable amount of artistic theory as well as art history and an understanding of the *kinds* of things that could be art. A century before, in 1864, *Brillo Box* could not have been art. To some critics, it was not art in 1964, either. Danto writes,

[I]n periods of artistic stability, there can be little doubt that works of art very frequently were found to have properties, failure of which would call seriously in question their status as artworks. But that time is long passed...Of course it does not follow from the fact that everything can be a work of art that everything is one.³⁸⁸

The artworld provides ‘time-indexed artworld theories and their implied narratives’ (Carroll, 1997). The artistic breakthroughs of the twentieth century paved the way for the acceptance of urinals and beds and Brillo boxes to become art.

2.4 Danto’s Mature Theory

In 1997, Danto put forward a revised version of his theory.³⁸⁹ This theory consists of two necessary conditions for art: for an object to be an artwork it must (1) be *about* something and (2) embody meaning. By (1) Danto means the work must *have a subject* and, by implication, be *interpretable*. The aspect of embodiment (2) carries the idea that the way the work is presented should be appropriate to what the subject is about. Danto explains,

[S]omething is a work of art when it has meaning - is about something - and when that meaning is embodied in the object in which the work of art materially consists...works of art are embodied meanings.³⁹⁰

Noël Carroll notes that in *The End of Art*, Danto does not specifically include his earlier ideas from ‘The Artworld,’ i.e., it is the narratives and theories of the Artworld that ‘enfranchise’ artworks.³⁹¹ Danto does, however, speak quite a bit about these in the book. Thus, it seems that he is simply building upon his earlier ‘Artworld’ thesis without

³⁸⁸ Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, Mass and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1981), pg., 65.

³⁸⁹ Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1997).

³⁹⁰ Arthur Danto, *What Art is* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), pg. 149.

³⁹¹ Noël Carroll, “Danto’s New Definition of Art and the Problem of Art Theories,” *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 37, no. 4, (October, 1997), pg., 386.

abandoning his earlier thoughts. Danto's thought has several strengths. He was the first to articulate a philosophy that explained the enfranchisement of 'ready-mades' or Pop art. Artists had been making *avant-garde* art for decades. New and innovative ways to make art were emerging all the time. However, the traditional definitions no longer provided an adequate explanation for their existence. Danto moved the conversation beyond what might be necessary and sufficient conditions for an object to be art. His concern was the philosophy behind these moves. By 1997, as has been demonstrated, he had come around to include necessary, if not jointly sufficient, conditions which reflect more of a definition. Together, his *oeuvre* could provide a clear and helpful path to understanding art.

The weakness of Danto's thesis is the possible ambiguity of an 'artworld.' Similar criticisms were levelled against the Institutional theory. If the artworld consists of all the works of art of ever produced, does that not suggest that we already know what art is?

3 Perhaps a Definition Has Been Attained?

As noted at the outset, this chapter in no way approached a comprehensive or exhaustive inquiry into the thoughts of all the artists, critics and philosophers who have been involved in the twentieth-century conversation about the nature of art. However, the voices we hear are significant contributors to the discourse.

Each of these commentators offers a piece of a larger definition or philosophy of art that might give the average art lover some guidelines to identify art. It is likely that art lovers could agree that 'art' needs be artefacts – and artefacts that are *about* something. Why should any viewer care about art if it is not *about* anything? Why else do we take time to appreciate art? It certainly can be affirmed with Weitz and the Neo-Wittgensteinians that a more open than closed system is preferred in order that more, rather than less, creativity be encouraged. There is something positive about the 'family resemblance theory.' We all think we know art

when we see it. However, Dickie and Danto provide parameters for this claim and show that we don't always know art when we see it. That is part of the dilemma to which they respond. Perhaps qualified experts are needed who can act as wise guides in the arts. While not an 'institution' in the formal sense, it is crucial to have those who know art and art theory and have experience in the field who can show viewers what to appreciate and how – what to look for and why it may be good or poor art.

There is also something to be said about being able to look backwards through history to see from where our art comes and how modern art connects to it. Aside from a few Communist regimes, it is a well-accepted truism that history is important – national history, family history, religious history, and scientific history. We know who we are because of who and what we came before. Therefore, a definition of art could go something like this: X is a work of art, if and only if it (1) is an artefact, (2) resembles many other works that are recognized and enjoyed as works of art, (3) has a connection to a long and recognizable history of art, (4) is a member of the world of art, (5) can be appreciated for its quality and skill, (6) has aspects that experts in the field can help us to understand and appreciate, (7) is about something, and (8) embodies meaning in a way that is appropriate to the subject.

4 The Insufficiency of the Definition and the Need For Maritain

I maintain that having reached this point of the inquiry is not insignificant. This chapter provides a brief sketch of the history of the discourse regarding the modern quest for a definition of art. Moreover, this sketch allows us to conceive a possible definition of art that makes room for modern art, installation art, Pop art, and almost every style of art brought forth in the last one hundred years. Yet, this definition, even if it is accurate and acceptable, does not enable us to answer the question, 'Can art be a medium for the experience of fullness?' and ultimately, 'Can art be a medium for connection with God?'

This is because the definitions and philosophies that were examined in this chapter focus on the *artefact*. ‘Art’, according to these definitions, is the *object* that hangs on the wall or is positioned on a pedestal in a gallery. Focusing attention on the object in the gallery, *as an object*, is unable to provide answers as to *how* that object can be a medium for the experience of fullness. These definitions of art are on the wrong track. Noël Carroll was headed in the right direction when he accused the Neo-Wittgensteinians of confusing *artworks* with the *practice* of art making. This critique was largely overlooked, however. The focus remained on the object itself.

Rather, what is needed to answer this dissertation’s question regarding art is a theory of art that begins in the human person. The more important questions about art, relevant to this study are, ‘How are works of art created?’ and ‘What are the effects the works of art have on its viewers?’

However, I maintain that it is necessary to incorporate the theory of art promulgated by philosopher Jacques Maritain. Maritain makes the necessary distinction between art and works of art. This is because, for Maritain, art is an internal disposition which is possessed by artists. Art is an interior reality which enables the artist to draw from his or her own subjectivity, i.e., what he or she knows and has experienced of the world, the things of the world, and even of God. This intuitive knowledge is then communicated through *works of art*. Works of art then provide the medium for an *experience* of fullness. Maritain shifts the focus of the discourse away from the ‘object in the gallery’ to the subjectivity of the artist, the creation of works, and, therefore, the effects of works of art on the viewer. In this way, Maritain’s views are crucial if a positive aesthetic answer can be given to the question, ‘Can art be a medium for the experience of fullness and ultimately, connection with the transcendent God?’

Moreover, it is Maritain's theory of art that emphasizes the interior effects of aesthetic experiences of works of art. Maritain's emphases best explain art's connection to transcendence. If the discourse is limited to or constrained by the necessary and sufficient conditions of the object on the wall, then we can offer little to no explanation of how such objects offer aesthetic experiences that can be actual encounters with the presence of God.

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