

POSTSECULAR VICTORIANS: LITERATURE, CULTURE, AND BELIEF

BY

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that nineteenth-century literature anticipated the vibrant interdisciplinary debates that now center on the meanings of secularism. For decades, modernity has been associated with the decline of religion, ignoring the many ways that modern institutions adapted religious feelings and practices, rather than simply discarding them. Indeed, many religious and irreligious nineteenth-century thinkers—including Charlotte Brontë, Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, and John Stuart Mill—actively grappled with issues of faith and rationality in a rapidly-changing economic, political, and cultural landscape. Prefiguring many of the key insights of the so-called “postsecular turn,” the work of these Victorian writers offers an ideal archive through which to show the various ways in which religion and modernity have been mutually constitutive. Ruskin’s series of essays in *Unto This Last* uses revamped Christian parable to underline the complicit individualism of Victorian Protestantism—resulting in a “postsecular” critique that anticipates William Connolly’s analysis of neoliberal capitalism. Examining one of Ruskin’s principal targets, J. S. Mill, reveals that Mill’s reputation as a wholly atheistic utilitarian derives from an impoverished secular understanding of Victorian modernity. Brontë’s *Villette* uses Gothic conventions to dramatize the challenges of sectarian religious difference through the trans-channel courtship between the Gallic Paul Emanuel and the ultra-Protestant Lucy Snowe. Finally, Arnold’s poetry and essays demonstrate the reemergence of diverse religious and philosophical inputs through a process of modern accretion—not linear subtraction. The nineteenth century offers a prime vantage from which to explore the very issues of religion, modernity, and the public sphere. Turning to the period in light of these concerns allows us not only to better understand the function and purpose of many Victorian literary texts, but also to configure our own engagement with the same questions.

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## Chapter 1:

### A Postsecular Age: Religion and Modernity in Victorian Literature

It is indeed useful to know what a particular religion is about, yet it is far more important to discover what religion is in general. This is the problem that from time immemorial has piqued the curiosity of philosophers, and not without reason; it interests all of humanity.

- Émile Durkheim

The last two decades or so have seen the idea of “the postsecular” inspiring a wealth of commentary across the humanities and social sciences, spurred on by discontent with the secularization thesis as it is conventionally put forward. This thesis posits an inverse relation between the rise of “secular” institutions and norms and the decline of their religious precursors. On this view, modernization inevitably leads to secularization which entails the gradual differentiation of the state, economy, and science from religious institutions and norms, followed by the marginalization and decline of religion altogether. Both Max Weber and Émile Durkheim, for example, described such a gradual transition from religious belief to modern disenchantment. As scholars such as Talal Asad and Vincent Pecora have argued, however, this account of secular modernity has largely been taken for granted rather than verified.

Secularization, as traditionally understood, is comprised of two facets. As the influential sociologist José Casanova has put it, these are “the *differentiation of the secular spheres* (state, economy, science), usually understood as ‘emancipation’ from religious institutions and norms,” and the concomitant “marginalization and privatization of religion” (*Public Religions* 7). In this dyad, the second follows as a logical extension of the first: that is, modern functional differentiation anticipates the decline of religious belief and the privatization of religious

practice, leading to the recession of religion's influence on the public sphere. However, as the sociologist Peter Berger argued in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (1999), this seemingly inevitable progression has not been borne out empirically.<sup>1</sup>

Functional differentiation has appeared to occur to varying degrees, often encouraged by religious and nonreligious people alike. In a European context, for example, specialized professions and the state have taken over the responsibilities of healthcare, education, and welfare—responsibilities once shouldered by ecclesiastical institutions (McCrea 20). However, the decline of religion has not always followed suit. Much of the discussion, therefore, has centered on whether or not our current moment is *postsecular* in meaningful ways.

For some scholars, the term indicates the perceived return of religion today after a century or more of secularism. In this context, the term may suggest that our present point in time simply represents the next stage in a progression from theism to the beginnings of agnosticism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the emergence of widespread atheism in the twentieth century. The resurgence of religion at the turn of the millennium thus implies that the triumphalist narratives of secularization have been outgrown as the importance of religion to modern life has been reasserted.

Clearly, the latter account relies on an oversimplified historical narrative in which a previously religious “phase” was replaced by a secular one, only to be replaced again by some sort of amalgam of the two. The result involves at least two faulty assumptions: first, that secularization represented a distinct break from religious belief and practice, and second, that postsecularity represents a somehow “new” perspective from which to reinterpret the binary

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<sup>1</sup> This represents a monumental about face for the author of *The Sacred Canopy* (1990), who argued in a 1968 interview in the *New York Times* titled “A Bleak Outlook is Seen for Religion” that by the 21<sup>st</sup> century, religion would be relegated to a few “small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture,” and that he anticipated “no reversal of the secularization process.”

division between religious faith and secular reason. In contrast, the most nuanced accounts of postsecularity—those of Jürgen Habermas, Pecora, and William Connolly, among others—entail a new recognition of the religious roots of the Enlightenment and the continuing impact of religion. Postsecularism, thus, emphasizes the many ways that modernity so-called involved the adaptation of religious affects, spaces, and practices, rather than a simple discarding or outgrowing. Postsecularism so conceived rejects narratives of secularization which posit religion's inevitable decline and supersession by science, technology, and rationalization, all traditional hallmarks of "modernity." At the same time, postsecularism also rejects triumphalist proclamations of the "return" of religion in its original form, acknowledging the very real and, likely, irrevocable changes to Western religious belief that began prior to the nineteenth century but manifested themselves especially during that century in Europe's history.

### *An Age of Unbelief?*

Scholars have long argued that the nineteenth century represented a watershed moment in the history of Christianity. As George Levine contends in *Realism, Ethics and Secularism* (2008), most mid-twentieth century literary critics "accept[ed]...that all of Victorian England was undergoing a crisis of faith," and was, therefore, "on the fast track to secularism...based largely on the reading of a select group of intellectuals" like Thomas Carlyle and George Eliot; seminal thinkers who embodied a culture "from which religion seemed to be being driven almost daily" (211, 212). Basil Willey, representative of such critics, writes of Eliot as epitomizing the nineteenth century in *Nineteenth-Century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold* (1949). Eliot's intellectual trajectory is thus paradigmatic of Victorian religious loss: "Starting from evangelical Christianity, the curve passes through doubt to a reinterpreted Christ and a religion of humanity:

beginning with God, it ends in Duty” (205). The “religion of humanity” emerged out of the positivism of August Comte (1798-1857), which regarded empirical, scientific observation alone as the source of all authoritative truth. Comte’s “religion,” advocated in a slightly different form by J. S. Mill, sought to retain the moral and political functions of Christianity—including its systems of public worship, prayers and sacraments—while replacing its theology with positivism, and shifting its object of worship from god to humanity itself.

As Walter Houghton contends, the triumph of a “scientific universe,” such as the one Comte described, represented for many Victorians not terror, but rather “a glorious dream.” To these men, the disintegration of Christian theology—at the hands of the historical criticism of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Ludwig Feuerbach—and the destruction of the idea of man as a “created being”—at the hands of the scientific work of Charles Lyell and Charles Darwin—came “as an enormous relief,” heralding as it did the death of superstition and “a new revelation of man’s destiny” (48). To others, however, the potential loss of faith *was* alarming. Carlyle, in his essay “Death of Goethe” (1832), famously stated his (disgruntled) intention to ardently attempt to live “the whole distracted existence of man in an age of unbelief” (343).

Approaching the “loss of faith” narrative through a different lens, J. Hillis Miller argues that the five nineteenth-century writers profiled in *The Disappearance of God* (1963), including Robert Browning and Matthew Arnold, represented “the culmination of a long process” of “the gradual withdrawal of God from the world.” While this did not mean “blank atheism,” it did mean, in Miller’s view, the breaking of the connection between man and God, and as a result “the nineteenth and twentieth centuries seem to many writers a time when God is no more present and not yet again present, and can only be experienced negatively, as a terrifying absence” (1, 2). The “unreachability” of God, Miller posits, rather than any technological or

scientific breakthroughs, “describe[s] the coming into existence of modern times” (4).

Characterizing the despair of the modern mind in the third volume of *Modern Painters* (1856), John Ruskin intoned, “The profoundest reason of this darkness of heart is, I believe, our want of faith.... There never yet was a generation of men...who, taken as a body, so woefully fulfilled the words ‘having no hope, and without God in the world,’ as the present civilized European race” (5:322).

Following Miller’s book, and influenced by A.O.J. Cockshut’s *The Unbelievers: English Agnostic Thought, 1840-1890* (1964) and Owen Chadwick’s *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (1975), this narrative of the retreat of faith became somewhat normalized among literary critics. As Joss Marsh relates in *Word Crimes: Blasphemy, Culture, and Literature in Nineteenth Century England* (1998), when proposing a doctoral thesis in the late eighties seeking to complicate the terrain of Victorian religious history, she was told by her advisers that “Chadwick, Cockshut, and Willey had settled the matter of the Victorian loss of faith.” “The novel of doubt” as practiced by James Anthony Froude (*The Nemesis of Faith*, 1849), Walter Pater (*Marius the Epicurean*, 1885), and Mrs. Humphry Ward (*Robert Elsmere*, 1888), among others, seemed “set forever to eke out existence as a dreary compendium of sociological data” confirming religion’s demise (5). David DeLaura’s *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England* (1969) reflects this impulse as well, in detailing John Henry Newman’s influence on Arnold and Pater. *Hebrew and Hellene* describes a genealogy by which “the ‘inwardness’ that Newman insists on as a man’s essential spiritual quality is secularized as part of Arnold’s criticism and culture and emerges finally as Pater’s ‘impassioned contemplation.’” Describing the degree to which all three men grappled with the increasingly complicated role of religion and of religious experience in the nineteenth century, DeLaura argues that “the full

dimensions of *secularity* in the modern world, especially as it has exhibited itself in phenomena of the mid-twentieth century like religious and atheistic existentialism” was a product of “the long-delayed fruits of ‘Modernist’ speculation in the late nineteenth century” (xii, xvii). Thus the “failure” of Arnold to “fuse reason and faith” and Pater to define “what the ‘third condition’ of man, transcending historical dualisms, might be,” are indicative of a breakdown of the spiritual center of the European tradition—a breakdown that was “in retrospect a rapid, and to men of many points of view, an appalling sight” (xvii, 344).

And yet, by all accounts, the nineteenth century in England was an extremely religious one. As Gerald Parsons argues, “that Victorian Britain was, indeed, a society remarkable for the extent and intensity of its religious life is barely open to question” (5). Richard Altick points out that “probably in no other century, except the seventeenth and perhaps the twelfth, did the claims of religion occupy so large a part in the nation’s life, or did men speaking in the name of religion contrive to exercise so much power” (*Victorian People and Ideas* 203). It “would be futile, he continues, “even to try to estimate how many copies of religious and moral works of all sorts were distributed in Britain in the nineteenth century,” since “[r]eligious literature was everywhere” (*English Common Reader* 108, 103). As historian Timothy Larsen posits, the ubiquity and taken-for-grantedness of the Victorian “crisis of faith” narrative has obscured much of the religious life and history of the period. Larsen contends, if one were to ask any Victorian scholar about the religiosity of the time, “you would be immediately told that it was very religious indeed” (1). While he acknowledges that there was a nineteenth-century crisis of faith of some kind, he argues that, as a motif for the religiosity of the period, it has become vastly overstated.

For an example, one need look no further than the controversy surrounding the Protestant reaction to Catholic Emancipation (1829), the Oxford Movement of the 1830s and 40s, and the near-violent reaction to the reinstatement of a Catholic hierarchy in England in 1850 to gauge the seriousness with which Victorians took religious matters. Yet, as John Kucich contends, while the case for Victorian religious *doubt* has perhaps been overstated, there was a very real sense that it was “both widespread and vocal in a way it had not previously been in England” (213). Readings like Kucich’s and others lend credence to Jerome Buckley’s assessment of the era as one of “bewildering complexity,” as any generalizations about the period tend to reveal as many contradictions as insights (9). The real sense of religious conflict has led critics like Houghton to label the period “an age of doubt,” and argue that the “basic and almost universal conception of the period”—one peculiarly Victorian—was the understanding that they were “living in *an age of transition*” (1). Edward Bulwer-Lytton, writing in *England and the English* (1833), characterized his age as one “of visible transition—an age of disquietude and doubt,” one in which “both the spiritual and temporal worlds are darkened by the shadow of change” (108).

The notion of the nineteenth century as an age of transition is compelling, and does much to explain the wide range and disparate views of the scholarly criticism on the period. That the Victorians could be read as representing historical apexes of both religiosity *and* doubt suggests a tumultuousness often prefiguring significant metamorphoses. But if the nineteenth century was an age of transition, the question arises: a transition to what? In his influential work, *A Secular Age* (2007), Charles Taylor has argued that the period marked a transition “from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace” (3). While this could be read, alongside Miller’s view, as a story of irrevocable and painful *loss*, seen another way, the

new moment of religion's *optionality* also offered positive possibilities. As Christopher Lane argues, while Victorians came to see doubt as inseparable from belief in a way "more profoundly than any generation before them," it also provided "a much-needed antidote to fanaticism and unbridled certainty" (4). Such doubt, theologian Harvey Cox famously argued in his bestseller *The Secular City* (1965), "convinced the believer that he *could* be wrong" and that the fruit of this realization is "pluralism and tolerance" (2,3). In such a world, we "cannot help but be aware that there are a number of different construals, views which intelligent, reasonably undeluded people, of good will, can and do disagree on" (Taylor 11). Connolly suggests that this recognition of religion's contingency should enjoin believers to assume a position of "relational modesty" that brings "a certain forbearance and hesitancy" to contests between camps self-identifying as "sacred" and "secular" (*Pluralism* 123). This modesty eschews the derision or dismissiveness which often accompanies such encounters, and can be greatly facilitated by the acknowledgement of the mutual constitutivity of belief and modernity, and the recognition of a common history, fraught though it has been. This particular understanding of pluralism is distinctively *postsecular* and operative in the work of key Victorian thinkers.

This dissertation adopts the particularly robust model of "critical" or "agonistic" pluralism which political theorists like Connolly advance. In contrast to Jürgen Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy—which presumes the possibility and tenability of a rational consensus—agonistic pluralism acknowledges difference and posits the mutual constitution of the rational and emotional; the logical and visceral; and the empirical and the imaginative and spiritual. Agonists accept conflict as inevitable and, what's more, see the battle lines as blurry and protean. Religiosity is not simply an obstacle to be overcome or a potential barrier to consensus that must be dispassionately relegated to the private sphere. For an agonist like

Connolly, the latter is impossible because, in modern America, religious practice and political economy “*infiltrate* each other” in messy ways, forging “assemblages” that are in fact in a condition of *resonance*, leading to mutual amplification, even as each retains a modicum of independence from the other (*Capitalism* 39, 40). In the face of such a pervasive resonance—one that I will argue can be traced back to the Victorian period—is the disintrication of religious practices from other spheres even possible? And, if possible, is disintrication the best way to overcome the pernicious effects of the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine, as Connolly describes it? To answer these and other questions, “Postsecular Victorians” takes up a postsecular understanding of Victorian modernity, and the ways in which key thinkers connected arguments grounded in reason to the affective, visceral, and spiritual inputs which conventional theories of secularization either ignore, overlook, or cast as arcane.

### ***Arc of the Dissertation***

Considering nineteenth-century literature and culture from this revisionist standpoint, I examine writers who called for pluralistic perspectives in the face of economic injustice as well as nationalistic, religious, racial, and ethnic prejudice. Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* (1860), for example, shows how religious allegory can revise the “science” of political economy, using revamped biblical parables to show how capitalistic norms undermine the Christian values that the Victorians imagined as central to their ethical culture. Ruskin’s position draws its strength from a potentially fruitful recognition of the symbiotic nature of religious tradition and the science of political economy. In doing so, Ruskin seeks not to dismantle or reject the economic system which functional differentiation has produced, but rather to uncover how in its mid-nineteenth century form political economy, with perplexing irony, both neglects and relies on

narratives of value and choice which are informed by religious discourse. Ruskin's aesthetic and social critique of the mainstream political economy of John Stuart Mill, for one, creates a counter-politico-economic discourse that acknowledges that the domains of religion and economics neither can nor should be disintegrated.

At the same time, however, I turn to the work of Mill himself—specifically, *On Liberty* as well as his three essays on religion: “Nature,” “The Utility of Religion,” and “Theism.” In doing so, I seek to emphasize that Mill's work does not deserve Ruskin's full ire, and in practice the two thinkers come to nearly the same conclusion. Furthermore, in looking at his writings on religion, coeval as they were with his writing on political economy, we can see how Mill complicates the conventional view of secularism despite his early reputation as a utilitarian thinker. As chapter two shows, Mill and Ruskin are important figures not only for thinking about postsecularity, but also for the kind of capitalist critique that makes sense in our modern moment—one that sees modes of religious belief and affiliation as potential allies rather than, as Karl Marx tended to suggest, always complicit with the status quo. Ruskin's work thus prefigures the type of “coalition” called for by William Connolly in his critique of the “evangelical resonance machine”: a coalition between those resisting the machine and “dissidents on the edge of that machine.” Ruskin's particular intervention, when combined with Connolly's vision, also represents an alternative to Marxist critiques of capital—one that considers religion as integral, rather than simply an ancillary or noxious effect of society.

Pluralistic postsecularism also illuminates Victorian-era resistance to nationalist insularity—the topic of chapter three, on Brontë's *Villette* (1853). Though it is often read as a species of anti-Catholic fiction, Brontë's most transnational novel, set in an imaginary space based on Belgium, is no simple invective against Catholic institutions and Gallic cultural

practices. Following Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever's *The Literary Channel* (2002), I consider *Villette* as a product of the "trans-Channel literary zone" while focusing on influential transnational religious formations that their collection of essays does not consider. Building on Amanda Anderson's reading in *The Powers of Distance* (2001), my emphasis on religious difference demonstrates how agonistic moments such as Lucy Snowe's confession are central to the novel's pluralistic ethos. *Villette* thus uses Gothic conventions to dramatize the challenges and possibilities of a pluralism inflected by national and religious difference. Through the trans-Channel courtship of the Catholic Paul Emanuel and the ultra-Protestant Lucy Snowe, the narrative reveals how sectarian religious difference—often assumed to be a force of ethnocentric division—can offset the tendency of Victorian pluralism to privilege Englishness.

This potentially radical statement is complicated by the fact that the novel's transnational imaginary is restricted to participants who share a Christian and European religious and textual history. Brontë's heroic attempt to build a bridge between the opposed forces of Catholicism and Protestantism thus rests on the tenuous basis of shared experience and texts. The implications for pluralist theory are clear: if such difficulties exist even amongst branches of a single religious tradition, how many more would be entailed by a truly robust religious pluralism in which a variety of traditions are brought into political and social discussions in the public sphere? Nonetheless, Brontë shows a striking willingness to combine a modern commitment to reason and a literary reading of scripture in the rejection of dogma—a move we see Matthew Arnold making twenty years later in *Literature and Dogma* (1873)—with an appeal to shared religious tradition. In doing so, she demonstrates a recognition of the benefit in promoting a pluralism that can read texts with a nuance rejected by dogmatists, and born of the recognition of Christianity's contingency. I argue that Brontë's advance of such ideas, in a time rife with inter-religious

prejudice and strife, demonstrates the type of intervention that postsecular thinking can contribute to formations of the robust pluralism demanded by our modern society, rendering accessible the seeming chasm between modernity and religious fundamentalism. Religion is therefore not necessarily an obstacle to cosmopolitan recognition, but rather a possible means by which a mutual respect for differences in faith and in culture can overcome national and cultural differences. Far from being disheartening, this realization should actually expand cosmopolitan possibilities. A postsecular approach provides an awareness that religion can be shared, might produce conflict, but must certainly be recognized as irrevocably important.

Chapter four turns to Arnold, and describes how essays and poems such as “Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse” anticipate a postsecular view of historical development and modernity described by Taylor and Vincent Pecora. For Taylor, many of the things we associate with modernity, including rationalization and a belief in “the omniscience of natural science” are not value-free, but are imbricated within a background of values that shape and determine their use and adoption. In this view, Western modernity is a “novel form of moral self-understanding” that moves us “from one dense constellation of background understanding and imaginary to another, both of which place us in relation to others and good” (32-3).

This postsecular view of historical development parallels what Vincent Pecora calls *Verwindung* (twisting-free/torsion). In contrast to the implacable teleology of Hegel’s *Aufhebung* (negating-overcoming-preserving), *Verwindung* describes the distortion, overcoming, and reemergence of received religious concepts. Arnold’s “Dover Beach” exemplifies this process: through auditory imagery and assonance, crashing waves evoke evanescence as well as timelessness, implying a constant grappling with potential loss which places the changing nature of Victorian religion into a longer story of human struggle. Rather than serving as a

representative example of the kind of irrevocable “loss” experienced by the Victorians, the poem instead can be seen to question the notion that the Victorian movement away from religious orthodoxy is somehow more permanent than the ancient Greek one of “Sophocles...on the Ægæan —a point also emphasized in Arnold’s “Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse.” Read in this context, “Dover Beach” suggests that the nature of development is accretive and cyclical, rather than subtractive and linear: transformation without telos or inevitability.

Arnold’s later criticism on religion extends this view, embodying a pluralistic perspective that situates the Bible as the product of a centuries-long *Verwindung* applicable to religious believers and atheists alike. Prefiguring Taylor’s understanding of background, Arnold focuses on the concept of “conduct” as a product of social understanding formed by modes of ritual and influences below the level of active, conscious inculcation. Thus, for Arnold, the notions are embedded so deeply that we experience them on an affective level. As he explains, “conduct is the word of common life, morality is the word of philosophical disquisition, righteousness is the word of religion.” Arnold’s ultimate goal is to demonstrate that religion continues to perform a useful function in preserving and inculcating right conduct, even (and perhaps especially) if the supernatural is left out of it. Hence, his argument that the Established Church was an important institution, disburdened of the dogma, since it was really to do with the transmission of ethical norms.

Postsecularism thus argues that religion can be a source of moral inspiration even to those who do not accept its metaphysical claims. In an influential essay entitled “Notes on a Post-Secular Society,” Habermas warns against the democratic state “preemptively reducing the polyphonic complexity of the diverse public voices,” by insisting on a pervasive and rigid secularism in the public sphere. In Habermas’ estimation, the danger lies in the possibility that

the state cannot know with certainty whether such a break might “[cut] society off from scarce resources for the generation of meanings and the shaping of identities.” Particularly with regard to vulnerable social relations, he argues, “religious traditions possess the power to convincingly articulate moral sensitivities and solidaristic intuitions” (29). As a period of nascent and often overlooked pluralism, the nineteenth century, I argue, offers a prime vantage from which to explore the very issues of religion and modernity which not only persist to this day, but seem to be increasingly relevant, both politically and philosophically. Turning to the period in light of these concerns allows us not only to better understand the function and purpose of many Victorian literary texts, but also to configure our own engagement with the same questions.

## Chapter 2:

### John Ruskin and John Stuart Mill: Toward a Postsecular Economy

Political Economy is neither an art nor a science; but a system of conduct and legislature founded on the sciences, directing the arts, and impossible, except under certain conditions of moral life.

- John Ruskin, from *Munera Pulveris* (1872)

So long as earthly life is full of sufferings, so long there will be need of consolations, which the hope of heaven affords to the selfish, the love of God to the tender and grateful. The value, therefore, of religion to the individual, both in the past and present, as a source of personal satisfaction and of elevated feelings, is not to be disputed.

- J.S. Mill, from "The Utility of Religion" (1874)

The influence of Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (1860) has been well-documented.<sup>2</sup> The work encouraged a young Mohandas Gandhi, spurred on William Morris in his pursuit of socialism, shaped J.A. Hobson's groundbreaking economic theory of underconsumption, and guided the formation of the Labour Party in Great Britain.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, while Ruskin scholars have long debated the extent of his intellectual legacy, modern society owes debts to Ruskin's thinking that we are only beginning to recognize. As Tim Hilton argues in his voluminous biography, "Ruskin should be studied for his own sake" (xix). Indeed, Ruskin's work contains insights that have gone largely unrecognized, and which bear directly on our current economic and political condition, as recent editorials by Andrew Hill of the *Financial Times* and Jonathan Glancey of the *Guardian* emphasize.

In what follows, I will argue that Ruskin's critique of political economy, castigated upon its publication, anticipates and attempts to transform the resonance between capitalism and

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<sup>2</sup> An earlier version of this chapter appeared as "Toward a Postsecular Economy: John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*" in *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 34.3 (2012). Sections are reprinted here with the permission of Taylor and Francis.

Christianity that William Connolly describes in his book *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (2008). In doing so, Ruskin does not seek to dismantle or reject the economic system that functional differentiation has produced, but rather to uncover how, in its mid-nineteenth century form, political economy ironically both neglects and relies on narratives of value and choice which are informed by religious discourse.<sup>2</sup> Such a recognition of the mutual constitutivity of faith and modernity, combined with a commitment to the continuing role of religion in public life regardless of one's personal beliefs, comprises the most compelling modern understandings of the "postsecular."

Through a reading of *Unto This Last*, which was written partly as a rejoinder to John Stuart Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), I argue that Ruskin astutely perceived the resonance of Victorian Protestantism and capitalist rationality. In response, he created a counter-politico-economic discourse that mobilizes Christian tradition to argue that the domains of religion and economics neither can nor should be disintegrated. Ruskin's move anticipates the understanding promoted by postsecularists like Connolly, who reject the teleological certainty that tends to accompany both Christianity and economics, while repudiating narratives of religion's decline and secularism's inevitable ascendancy. *Unto This Last* thus represents an exemplary postsecular discourse, even as his later work on economics relies less explicitly on religious language. Moreover, I demonstrate not only Ruskin but also his adversary Mill anticipate recent postsecular thought, despite the latter's reputation as a wholly atheistic utilitarian thinker.

The term *postsecularism* has attracted much recent commentary across the humanities and social sciences. Formulations typically proceed by challenging the traditional secularization thesis which, as José Casanova explains, posited the gradual differentiation of the state,

economy, and science from religious institutions and norms, followed by the marginalization and decline of religion. As Talal Asad, among others, has suggested, this account of secularization has largely been taken for granted, rather than interrogated. The influential narratives of Max Weber and Émile Durkheim, for example, describe a transition from religious belief to modern disenchantment. However, this seemingly inevitable progression has not been borne out empirically, as Peter Berger has emphasized, from a sociological viewpoint. While functional differentiation has occurred to varying degrees, encouraged in the West by religious as well as nonreligious constituencies, the decline of religion has not always followed suit. Likewise, many recent scholars question whether the privatization of religious beliefs is necessary, inevitable, or good.<sup>3</sup>

Scholars of postsecularism, thus, emphasize the many ways that modernization repurposed religiosity, rather than simply discarding it. The term not only describes the resurgence of religion in the late twentieth century but also corrects a faulty account of modernity's provenance. As Aleksandr Morozov argues,

‘Secularisation’ as an all-embracing process no longer exists, but the reason it no longer exists is not because it has come to an end as a process with the onset of the postsecular age. The reason is rather that there never was such a process. There was only self-description on the part of the rationalising consciousness, which singled out this process as real and significant. (41)

This persuasive account registers the awareness that so-called secular modernity and religion have all along been mutually constitutive. What I am calling *postsecularism* in this essay, then, recognizes the role of religion in modern life—public as well as private—including the ethical resources that religious communities among others can offer. While such a view acknowledges religion's place in modern history, it also recognizes the value of differentiating processes like

the separation of church and state. Such an understanding, richly exemplified by the work of William Connolly, can help us to reconsider the economic critique of John Ruskin.

***Theorizing the “Evangelical-Capitalist-Resonance Machine”***

In works like *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (1999), *Pluralism* (2005), as well as the recent *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style*, Connolly signals his intention to “rewrite secularism” to include engagement with religious and metaphysical perspectives (*Secularist* 39).<sup>4</sup> The “secular *modus vivendi*,” he provocatively argues, “ignores or devalues some dimensions of being that need to be engaged more openly,” including religious belief (*Secularist* 19). This postsecular awareness animates Connolly’s critique of what he calls the “evangelical-capitalist resonance machine,” his term for the contemporary American politico-spiritual “assemblage” formed between “the evangelical right,” composed of militant, fundamentalist denominations, and “cowboy capitalism,” a free-wheeling, *laissez-faire* approach to social and economic concerns that idealizes hyper-competitive and hyper-individualistic business practices and rejects government regulation (*Capitalism* 7). Following Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, he explains that “no political economy or religious practice is self-contained.” Instead, “in politics these diverse elements *infiltrate* each other, metabolizing into a moving complex,” forging “assemblages” that are “resistant to classical models of explanation” (*Capitalism* 39-40). Connolly’s point is not simply that religion, politics, and economics are intertwined; rather, in modern America, they are in a condition of *resonance*, leading to mutual amplification.

For Connolly, the connection between the neoliberal and neoconservative agendas and the religious right is not immediately obvious or openly acknowledged—even among their respective constituents. Nonetheless, these positions share the common strains of eschatological

certainty (foretelling looming economic failure and “last day judgment”), bellicose moralizing, and revenge fantasies (against “economic egalitarians” and “pluralists and nonbelievers”). Connolly, channeling Nietzsche, suggests that both sides of the assemblage, in their perception of suffering persecution, can easily succumb to a spirit of *ressentiment*. On the one hand, fundamentalist Christianity resents the marginalized role it plays in a (seemingly) secular society, paradoxically exerting its considerable force politically, in an act of revenge against its detractors. On the other, cowboy capitalists on the cutting-edge of pioneering entrepreneurship chafe at the restrictions and regulations placed on them by government entities; restrictions which only fuel their “maverick” mentality and validate their feelings of persecution. How, then, to disrupt this resonance with all its negativity, and forestall “the all-too-human slide from specific political resentments to resentment?” (*Capitalism and Christianity* 58).

Connolly’s answer, in lieu of a seemingly unattainable “deep pluralism,”<sup>5</sup> is to pursue “selective lines of connection with constituencies on the edge of the evangelical-capitalist machine” (*Capitalism and Christianity* 58), to disrupt the resonance from the inside out. As an example, Connolly offers recent discussions of “Open Theism,” often considered “post-Evangelical,” and its belief in a God who can “learn”—that is, change his mind. Such an understanding, Connolly argues, replaces a spirituality infused with revenge with one inspired by “spirituality of care for the fragility of the world” (*Capitalism and Christianity* 61). Ultimately, whether it be minority theologies or dissenting economic theories, Connolly suggests that allying with dissidents *within* the resonance machine can be the most effective way of upsetting its agenda. While the actual outcome of this tactic is uncertain, what does seem certain is this: correctives either to the economic or religious components of the machine are unlikely to succeed unless conveyed in terms familiar to them. Appeals to empiricism alone are as unlikely

to move religious believers as appeals to moral law alone are unlikely to sway free-market economists.

Considering what Connolly calls the resonant nature of capitalist/neoliberal economics and evangelicalism, it stands to reason that the most effective arguments would appeal to both sides of the resonance, emphasizing their mutual constitutivity, in service of a more ethical and just society. Throughout *Unto This Last*, Ruskin appeals to familiar religious metaphors and to the Christian values of *caritas*, justice, and responsibility with the same vigor as he addresses the practical workings of a market economy. Though by 1858 Ruskin had essentially rejected the staunch evangelicalism of his youth, he retained a commitment to responsibility, probity, and economic rectitude—ideals historically seen as hallmarks of an evangelical attitude towards economy—in order to critique the very relationship between evangelicalism and Victorian capital. In order to make his argument appeal both to the economists and a public greatly influenced by evangelical thinking on economics, Ruskin adopted a postsecular frame to expose and resist the Victorian commitment to an “evangelical-capitalist resonance machine”—Connolly’s term for the politico-spiritual assemblage formed between a punishing evangelicalism and a free-wheeling, *laissez-faire* approach to social and economic concerns (“cowboy capitalism”). As Boyd Hilton’s seminal work *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought* (1988) demonstrates, the kind of assemblage now associated with what Connolly calls “the capitalism of neoliberal finance and neoconservative culture” (*Capitalism* 9) of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, has strong roots in nineteenth-century Britain. While the reasons for this Victorian resonance differ, at times, from those described by Connolly, the ideological relationship between Protestant evangelicalism and capitalism bears striking similarities to the assemblage in operation today.

Indeed, many scholars of the Victorian period have been keen to emphasize precisely this historical connection. For example, both Isobel Armstrong and Elaine Hadley note the importance that modern neoconservatives like Gertrude Himmelfarb, Newt Gingrich, William Bennett and Margaret Thatcher place on “Victorian values,” with the implied (or, at times, explicit) connection to Christian morality.<sup>6</sup> Hadley concludes that the focus on values and “character,” rather than on the seemingly more obvious connection to Victorian political economy, neglects the ways that character “relies on and effaces its origins in property and the contemporary social system of classification that built its foundations on such property” (14). I argue that we can read this process as yet another way of characterizing the assemblage that Connolly describes: one in which “a neoliberal economy solicits a neoconservative approach to social mores” (*Capitalism* 148).

In much the same way, as Hilton explains, the dominant mode of thought of the first half of the nineteenth century was “an amalgam of enlightenment rationalism and evangelical eschatology, and its core or ‘hinge’ was the Christian doctrine of the Atonement” (3). At its core, this amalgam nurtured a distinct resonance between evangelicalism and capitalism. The concept of *laissez-faire* was of great import both to classical economists, like Ricardo and the early J. S. Mill (though he would later move away from this position), and to the evangelical movement of the first half of the nineteenth century. As Hilton demonstrates, evangelicals embraced *laissez-faire* economic and social policies which were perceived to nurture individual morality. At the same time, evangelicals perceived God as allowing the material world to operate providentially along *laissez-faire* lines: since God abstained from meddling directly in the affairs of man, man should also refrain from meddling. While, as Hilton argues, the second half of the century could be characterized by a softening shift to the doctrine of the “incarnation,” and its attendant

concern for social welfare issues, the first half was dominated by this arguably harsher and certainly stricter doctrine of atonement.

A key figure in Hilton's account is the Scottish minister and political economist Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847), who championed individualism and favored the complete rejection of state-sponsored economic paternalism.<sup>7</sup> An interesting mix of radical thinking and political Toryism, Chalmers' interest in economics was born out of his lifelong mission to alleviate the problem of poverty in industrial cities. At the same time, he was "a free trader who considered that the state had no role to play in regulating either poor relief or commerce," believing that paternal intervention "would obscure the providence of God apparent in the business cycle" (121). This line of thinking viewed recurring economic crashes as natural and good, punishing businessmen who were too greedy, and reminding people of the fragility of material wealth. Chalmers thus reconciled his concern for the poor and his economic theory through his conviction that at its best unfettered commerce provided a framework for Christian discipline in ordinary life which served the higher goal of spiritual training. Thus, evangelicals like Chalmers used their influence in the pulpit and the press to align Protestant morality with the tenets of classical political economy. Ruskin's 1860 intervention, therefore, was not simply a religious reply to godless capitalism, but a reaction to the mid-Victorian era's evangelical-capitalist resonance.

### ***Unto This Last and Victorian Political Economy***

Raised by a devout, evangelical mother and a wine merchant father, Ruskin was familiar with both evangelical theology and the vicissitudes of the market in practice and theory, having read (albeit selectively) J.S. Mill (1806-73), David Ricardo (1772-1823) and Xenophon (431-355

BC),<sup>8</sup> and having seen firsthand not only the art market, but his family's wine business. In fact, this connection was often both spiritual and practical. As Michael Wheeler recounts, many of Ruskin's diaries and manuscripts, "including that of *Unto This Last*, are written either in ledgers or on vertically ruled accounts paper of the kind used by his father—a constant reminder of the profit-and-loss economy of both the wine trade and Evangelical Christianity" (167). Indeed, Francis O'Gorman has persuasively argued that in addition to offering moral support for his *Cornhill* essays, Ruskin's father, John James Ruskin, provided the model for the "honourable merchant honestly providing for the nation" (18). While he enjoyed his own father's support, Ruskin's critique raised the ire of other evangelical capitalist fathers. As Tim Hilton suggests, "The *Cornhill* papers are the first of Ruskin's writings in which he confronted not only the orthodox economists but also John La Touche—Spurgeon's convert, an inflexible Bible Christian, a landlord and a banker from a family of bankers" (296).<sup>9</sup> La Touche a "staunch evangelical of the old school,"<sup>10</sup> was by no means the last to be disturbed by Ruskin's approach.

Though by 1858 Ruskin had relinquished the staunch evangelicalism of his youth, his works clearly draw on ideals of responsibility, probity, and economic rectitude—historically seen as hallmarks of an evangelical attitude towards economy—in order to critique the existing relation between the Protestant religious ethos and Victorian capital. As Robert Hewison notes, Ruskin's use in *Unto This Last* of imagery that stressed the "fundamental opposition of life and light, and death and darkness" was "not only an Evangelical type; it is also an archetype, and would be recognized instinctively" (*Argument of the Eye* 141, 142). Ruskin's efforts were thus carefully calculated to disturb the complacency of a Victorian public that had been led by evangelicals like Chalmers not only to accept the increasing association between religion and

classical economic thinking, but also to accept the implicit moral precepts of political economy as a matter of course.

John D. Rosenberg begins his now-famous intellectual history of Ruskin with a simple, but telling, anecdote. Noting how Ruskin's mother, "a puritanical Scot, allowed him neither playmates or playthings," Rosenberg relates how the young boy turned his attention to nature and art, honing his powers of observation on the forms and patterns which would draw him later to Turner and Fra Angelico (1). These powers served Ruskin well throughout his career, as he offered his observations and interpretations of fields as varied as architecture, painting, economics, and politics.<sup>11</sup> While Ruskin's claims of deprivation in *Praeterita* (1885-89) are most likely exaggerated, his account there of his religious training, and its importance to his mental development, is undeniable. Trained to read and memorize the Bible from a young age (he was explaining and memorizing the Lord's Prayer by age three), Ruskin thanked his mother "for the resolutely consistent lessons which so exercised me in the Scriptures as to have made every word of them familiar to my ear in habitual music" (Hilton, *John Ruskin* 14). Despite the gradual loss of Ruskin's personal faith—from initial doubt in 1848 to decisive loss in Turin in 1858—and its eventual return in modified form in 1875, his appeals to religious imagery and a paternalistic frame taken partly from scripture are present in nearly all his writing, and nowhere more so than in *Unto This Last*. Indeed, in response to Russel Edward Kacher's argument that Ruskin ceased referencing scripture in *Munera Pulveris* and after in order to be taken more seriously, Jason Camlot argues that "the tactic of definition common in religious oratory is employed as aggressively as ever in the sequel to *Unto This Last*" (105).<sup>12</sup> Thus, against readings of a secularized Ruskin, Michael Wheeler has made a convincing case in *Ruskin's God* (1999) for reading *Unto This Last*'s critique of capital as a form of "wisdom literature" in the Solomonic

tradition (26).<sup>13</sup> Indeed, his retention of religious language in the face of his waning faith bolster postsecular readings of his work. In particular, the continued use of Christian tropes and parables suggest Ruskin's discernment of a Victorian evangelical-capitalist assemblage, and his conviction that key aspects within the assemblage could be used to articulate a new resonance—one both more humane and more just.

Ruskin's familiarity with economic theory has long been the subject of debate. He did not help his own case by stating, deviously, in his preface to "A Joy Forever" that "I have never read any author on political economy, except Adam Smith, twenty years ago" (16:10). While this statement did much to harm his public reputation as a critic of economy, recent critics have demonstrated Ruskin's claim to be a facetious one.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, no less an authority than the economist J.A. Hobson defended Ruskin's economic credentials, arguing that Ruskin understood the economics of art and art production, at the very least, better than nearly anyone else (71). He certainly did not recoil from critiquing economists in their own terms. Rather than merely relying on moral arguments, Ruskin makes the radical claim that true wealth would actually *increase* as a result of his proposals. By meeting the economists on their own ground, and examining the very terms of economic discourse, Ruskin elevates his essays from moralizing to economic critique. What has seemed to some critics like bombast or fabulistic indulgence is actually a sophisticated and systematic approach to transfiguring economic principles through the reintroduction of a Christian frame.

As José Casanova notes, "No other sphere of the saeculum would prove more secular and more unsusceptible to moral regulation than the capitalist market. No other media of exchange and social interaction would prove as impersonal and as generalizable as 'money'" (23). Casanova's account belies, however, the degree to which Victorians perceived their relationship

with economics as a moral one. Led by modern evangelicals like Chalmers to accept the increasing association between religion and classical economic thinking, the Victorian public was all too willing to accept the implicit moral precepts of political economy as a matter of course. Alan Lee cites the journalist John Lalor who “pointed out in 1852 [that] 99 per cent of people did regard political economy as a moral code, despite the protestations of Senior and Mill” (72). Thus the politico-economic idea of the “economic man” was widely accepted as being not only descriptive, but normative as well, if not necessarily by economists themselves. As P.D. Anthony argues, Ruskin’s critique of economics anticipates the understanding, now familiar to social science, “that the claim to scientific objectivity conceals a normative element.” As a result, the economist only “barely avoids the conclusion that what the selfish man does is what the rational man ought to do” (79). Seen in this way, Ruskin’s problem is that political economy implies a concealed normativity, naturalizing the market conditions it describes. Indeed, as Hewison argues, such a widely-accepted view of political economy motivated the angry responses to Ruskin’s essays, which “exposed the blind selfishness which lay beneath the complacent belief that to act in one’s own interests was also to act in the interests of society” (139).

Ruskin astutely perceived that the evangelical conflation of Protestant morality and a laissez-faire approach to economics created severe, unintended consequences. While the domains of economics and evangelical theology experienced profound resonance, and while evangelicals favored the freedom of markets as a testing ground for spiritual faith, the markets and businessmen themselves were not bound to their purported Christian ethics by anything more than lip-service. As Jeffrey Spear notes, discussing the convictions shared by Ruskin and Carlyle, both men “perceived the inconsistency between the conduct enforced by Victorian

capitalism and the behavior required by anything approaching a literal interpretation of Gospel ethics.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, as Ruskin argues with respect to widespread acceptance of the “science” of political economy,

I know no previous instance in history of a nation’s establishing a systematic disobedience to the first principles of its professed religion. The writings which we (verbally) esteem as divine, not only denounce the love of money as the source of all evil, and as an idolatry abhorred of the Deity, but declare mammon service to be the accurate and irreconcilable opposite of God’s service... (17:75)

If, as Ruskin argues, what had historically been coded in terms of “right and wrong,” had now come to be increasingly figured in terms of “legality and illegality” (17:50), evangelical moralists of the Chalmers mold could observe something like a providential invisible hand at work. By contrast, Ruskin saw that political economy was becoming divorced from its “political” side, in the root sense of *polis*: a civic concern with human flourishing. As such, it would be practiced in society as a science interested only in “gain,” by any means *legally* allowable—as it increasingly came to be—while evangelicals saw a proving ground for a God-given individualistic morality.

*Unto This Last*’s critique of the evangelical-capitalist assemblage can thus be read as an important precursor and counter-narrative to Max Weber’s treatment of the history of capitalism. Citing the Puritan Richard Baxter (1615-91) and John Wesley (1703-91), Weber describes the importance to Protestant capitalism not only of “calling” but also of the necessity of “private profitableness” as a metric of the validity of one’s calling. According to Baxter, “If God show you a way in which you may lawfully get more than in another way (without wrong to your soul or any other), if you refuse this, and choose the less gainful way, you cross one of the ends of your calling, and you refuse to be God’s steward, and to accept His gifts and use them for Him

when He requireth it...” (Weber 108). It is easy to see how such an observation, purportedly in line with Protestant ethics, could encourage both the supposedly natural inclination towards acquisitiveness and the push to expand “lawful” economic activities.

Such a mode of development, Weber argues, formed the “mechanical foundations” for a capitalism that no longer needs the support of the religious asceticism that bore it. Yet Weber’s compelling account succumbs to the fallacy that the differentiation of economic and ecclesiastic spheres entailed the complete secularization of capitalism. Thus, as Connolly observes, Weber does not recognize the continuing role of religion in the functioning of capital, even as he demonstrates how Protestant ethics created an originary evangelical-capitalist assemblage. Seen another way, Weber’s argument reproduces many of the same lines of reasoning taken by Victorian classical economists—the very targets of Ruskin’s intervention.

As John Rosenberg notes, Nassau Senior (1790-1864), “the most orthodox of the economists...claimed that political economy necessarily ignores the problems of whether wealth is beneficial to its possessor or to society, what mode of distribution is most desirable, and how such distribution can best be obtained” (133). Recognizing the influence that such a disconnect has on the practice of economy, Ruskin seeks to remind Victorian political economists and evangelicals alike of the flaws in theories that do not adequately account for the human aspect, while sounding a warning bell that the abstraction of ethics and morality from such theories ignores the pervasive impact of economics on modern life. To do so he attacks the supposed science of political economy.<sup>16</sup>

As I have noted, Victorian political economists, including Senior, Ricardo and J. S. Mill, insisted that their science was universal and value-free rather than invested in particular

normative propositions. Further, they argued that political economy was, by design, limited to only one aspect of human functioning. J.S. Mill famously put it this way:

What is now commonly understood by the term ‘Political Economy’ is not the science of speculative politics, but a branch of that science. It does not treat of the whole of man’s nature as modified by the social state, nor of the whole conduct of man in society. It is concerned with him solely as a being who desires to possess wealth, and who is capable of judging of the comparative efficacy of means for obtaining that end. (“Political Economy” 108)

Ruskin’s claim in *Unto This Last* is that such qualifications are hardly exculpatory. Beginning with faulty assumptions about the nature of man, political economy thus produced a faulty conception of wealth and monetary profits rather than evoking the true wealth of nations. Such true wealth, Ruskin famously defined as the sum total “useful or pleasurable things”—as opposed to merely to things with a high market value (17:44).

Political economy’s focus on the “mercantile” or exchange economy posed a considerable problem: it deceptively claimed to consider only empirical facts relating to capital exchange even while adducing a calculative norm that privileged the most narrow and individualistic of human desires. As Anthony has pointed out, the strong claims for the mercantile economy’s “dispassionate rationality” transformed a particular perspective on what “is” into a tacit case for what “ought to be,” influencing the ethical horizon in which business was and would be conducted. Further, as Ruskin demonstrates, evangelicalism had done little to counter such thinking, invested as it was in the individualistic notion of freedom *from* which classical economics purported to offer. By attending Ruskin’s essays closely, we can see precisely how he sought to transform and clarify, rather than abolish, political economy through a demonstrably postsecular lens. In doing so, Ruskin rejected the simple opposition between “religious” and “secular,” cognizant of the ways that religion continues to inform modern

rationalities such as political economy, and eager as he was to intervene to make that assemblage more just.<sup>17</sup>

*Unto This Last* was initially published as a series of essays beginning in December of 1860, in the William Thackeray-edited *Cornhill Magazine*. So negative was the reaction from some quarters to Ruskin's critique of political economy that after the first three essays, George Smith, owner of the *Cornhill*, ordered Thackeray to halt the publication of further installments.<sup>18</sup> In response, Thackeray allowed Ruskin to conclude his thoughts in a final, longer essay, bringing a premature end to Ruskin's attack.

Despite the complaints that the art critic was wandering far from his purview, the essays in the *Cornhill* were actually a logical outgrowth from Ruskin's longstanding campaign against the excesses of capitalism and industrialization. As evidenced by the passage from *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) cited in the epigraph to this chapter, Ruskin was already demonstrating a concern with the socio-economic condition of Britain more than a decade before *Unto This Last*. His now-famous essay "The Nature of Gothic," which appeared in the second volume of *The Stones of Venice* (1853), saw the critique in its formative stages. There, alongside his detailed discussion of Gothic architecture, he decried the division of labor which he felt was "the degradation of an operative into a machine" (10:194)<sup>19</sup>. His opposition to mainstream political economy was perhaps inevitable, since Ruskin had come to believe that reform in art or architecture would be of no use to a society that neither appreciated art nor cultivated artists.<sup>20</sup>

Ruskin's explicit turn to economics began in the summer of 1857, with a pair of lectures delivered at Manchester entitled "The Political Economy of Art" to celebrate the "Art Treasures of the United Kingdom" exhibition. In the preface to his published edition of the lectures, Ruskin states, unequivocally, that "Political economy means, in plain English, nothing more than

“citizens’ economy”; and its first principles ought, therefore, to be understood by all responsible citizens and householders (16:9). This civic definition of political economy preoccupied Ruskin for the remainder of his life, even as he sought to revive an earlier, paternalistic social economy—rejected by Victorian evangelicals like Chalmers—which included human and moral dimensions, in stark contrast to the emphasis on abstraction and calculation that marked the “science” of political economy. Classical economics, Ruskin contended, substituted for human beings the “economic man,” whose only concern was profit, from whom social affections were subtracted, and who would flourish in an atmosphere of *laissez-faire*.<sup>21</sup> This abstract human subject could not hope to describe accurately, much less form the basis for, a social economy that sustained human wellbeing. At the same time, Ruskin criticized moderate evangelicals who supported unregulated commerce, especially as frequent crashes in the business cycle revealed that it was not, in fact, the guiltiest debtors or the greediest businessmen who always suffered.

Many contemporaries were put off by Ruskin’s unexpected departure from criticism on art and architecture. According to Julia Wedgwood, for example, “When Ruskin speaks of Nature and Art, he seems to me inspired” but “When he turns to finance, to politics, to the social arrangements and legislative enactments of mankind, I can recognise neither sober judgment nor profound conviction” (Harris 14).<sup>22</sup> Yet, thanks in part to an economic downturn in the late 1860’s along with the gradual rise of trade unionism and socialism,<sup>23</sup> opinion of Ruskin began to shift. By the turn of the century, J. A. Hobson could argue that Ruskin had “done more than any other Englishman to compel people to realize the nature of the social problem in its wider related issues affecting every department of work and life, and to enforce the supreme moral obligation of confronting it (Hobson, *John Ruskin* vi). *Unto This Last* represents Ruskin’s active intervention in the evangelical-capitalist resonance machine of his own day. The four essays that

comprise *Unto This Last* demonstrate his belief that under-attended elements within Christianity could provide a restraint to the destructively avaricious tendencies of capitalist exchange, which evangelicalism Protestantism itself was encouraging and enabling.

### ***“Justice” and “Affection” in Ruskin’s Human Economy***

The title of *Unto This Last* is taken from one of Christ’s parables of the vineyard, found in Matthew 20. In this particular story, a certain vineyard owner hires laborers early in the morning at the rate of one penny. Throughout the day, he returns to the marketplace, offering the same work to the remaining, idle laborers with the promise, with respect to wage, that “whatsoever is right I will give you.” At the end of the day, it happens that all laborers receive the same wage: one penny. Naturally, the laborers hired in the early hours, having long toiled in the hot sun, feel ill-used. The conclusion of the parable, used by Ruskin as an epigraph to the book, embodies the main thrust of his argument. Addressing the disgruntled employees, the vineyard owner explains: “Friend, I do thee no wrong. Didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way. I will give Unto This Last even as unto thee” (17:13).

As an example of Christ’s teachings about “the kingdom of heaven,” and salvation being offered to the “Gentiles” even late in the “day,” the passage is representative; but as a preface to a work on economy, the passage is remarkable. While Ruskin would have assumed his readership’s familiarity with the parable, the fact that he takes it quite literally is important.<sup>24</sup> As Clive Wilmer explains in his introduction to the Penguin edition of *Unto This Last*,

The first and most important key to Ruskin’s politics is to be found in his mother’s Biblical instruction. Evangelical Protestantism insists that the Bible is the Word of God and must be taken literally. The Ruskin of the economic writings was no fundamentalist...but brought up in that tradition, he could not escape the implications of Biblical teaching on questions of money, labour,

food and the status of the poor. It was no longer possible to regard the Genesis stories as historical, but there was no reason why the moral teaching of the New Testament should not be taken literally. (22)

In addition to signaling his intentions to address an audience influenced by evangelical-capitalist thinking, Ruskin's very literal and unusual reading of the parable sets the stage for two key premises of *Unto This Last*. First, the relationship between the landowner and his laborers is not one of advantage or profit, but by justice and affection. As Clive Wilmer explains, "the householder pays all his workers the same, not in order to under-pay those who have borne 'the burden and the heat of the day,' but because all men have equal needs" (158). In this way, the landowner's affection for his fellow men frames his decision to provide sufficiently for their physical needs. His decision to pay them equally, superseding his own interest in profit maximization, displays his understanding of justice. The second premise, an extension of the first, is that an understanding of true wealth, as opposed to "illth"—a term Ruskin coined to refer to the accumulation of useless goods and the maximization of profit by a small mercantile class—determines the landowner's economic decisions. Victorian political economists argued that competition for wages set independently by employers would lead to the most efficient deployment of capital and to the greatest wealth generation.<sup>25</sup> In contrast to this bourgeois form of social relation, and with the model of land stewardship partly in mind, Ruskin asks a startling question: "how far it may be possible to fix the rate of wages, irrespectively of the demand for labour" (17:33). Such a system, Ruskin believes, would generate and distributing true wealth by providing for the greatest number of healthy people.

The two motifs comprising Ruskin's first premise, and governing *Unto This Last*—*justice* and *affection*—both contest the mainstream politico-economic view of social relations and both are articulated in distinctly Christian terms. In part by invoking biblical Christian morality

against the “science” of political economy, Ruskin makes the case that a system that neglects the human element of economics, yet purports to prescribe the workings of human interaction, is doomed to failure. In doing so, he chastises evangelicals for not drawing on the resources available within their theology to counteract the more cruel individualism of the market.

From the first sentence of his first essay, “The Roots of Honor,” Ruskin lays out his primary critique of political economy: that the “modern *soi-disant*” science is “based on the idea that an advantageous code of social action may be determined irrespectively of the influence of social affection” (17:25). Ruskin thus shows how mainstream political economy presumes an antagonistic relationship between employer and employee which, more often than not, becomes unjust when it should be a relation of affection and mutual respect. By way of example, he offers a military analogy: “It is easy to imagine an enthusiastic affection existing among soldiers for the colonel. Not so easy to imagine an enthusiastic affection among cotton-spinners for the proprietor of the mill” (17:32). This illustration represents the stark difference between the perceived expectations of soldiers, who are willing to give their lives for their duty, and merchants, who are not (but who should be, as Ruskin later argues). As a result, the officer’s interactions with the soldiers he commands are, according to Ruskin, governed by respect and care, while those of the merchant by self-interest and exploitation. Political economists would argue that affection does not accrue because the owner and worker have distinct, even antagonistic interests, while the soldier and commander do not. Ruskin’s rejoinder is that “it does not absolutely or always follow that the persons must be antagonistic because their interests are” (17:27).

According to the principles of political economy, we must assume that in the relations between owner and worker, the rules of competition apply: the master will attempt to pay as little

as possible to the worker who seeks the greatest wage he can. At the same time, however, Ruskin points out that “[i]t is not in the master’s interest to pay wages so low as to leave the men sickly and depressed, nor the workman’s interest to be paid high wages if the smallness of the master’s profit hinders him from enlarging his business, or conducting it in a safe and liberal way” (17:28). According to the political economist, market forces will eventually find an equilibrium enabling workers to earn a living wage while employers earn a profit. Not surprisingly, the history of economics has yet to bear out this hypothesis empirically.<sup>26</sup>

In Ruskin’s view, the indeterminacy of “reciprocal interests” as posited by political economy renders the theory unable to formulate rules for economic action. Ruskin posits that no human actions ever were intended by the Maker of men to be guided by balances of expediency, but by balances of justice. He has therefore rendered all endeavours to determine expediency futile for evermore. No man ever knew, or can know, what will be the ultimate result to himself, or to others, of any given line of conduct. But every man may know, and most of us do know, what is a just and unjust act. And all of us may know also, that the consequences of justice will be ultimately the best possible, both to others and ourselves, though we can neither say what *is* best, or how it is likely to come to pass. (17:28)

Ruskin strikingly claims that justice (which occurs in the here and now) can guide economic action far more positively than speculations about individual self-interest (which are effectively unknowable). Further, his reference to a providentialistic basis for justice (the intensions of the “Maker of men”) exemplifies his strategy of reframing the resonance between Christianity and capitalism in human and ethical terms. Rejecting the merely instrumental and material metrics that economics invokes, Ruskin reaffirms a higher notion of divinely sanctioned justice. In doing so, Ruskin reverses Adam Smith’s logic of the “invisible hand.” While Smith argued that providential forces beyond human knowledge would ensure that self-interest would work for the

benefit of society at large, Ruskin contends that such forces intervene to ensure that just acts, rather than self-interested or expedient ones, lead toward social improvement.

Of course, Ruskin might simply have opted for a non-theistic understanding of justice in this passage. That he does not do so demonstrates his awareness of his readers' religious feelings as well as his effort to confront head-on the complicit Protestant individualism underlying the evangelical-capitalist assemblage of his time. Victorian readers of *Unto This Last* need not have been practicing Christians to appreciate the radical economic implications of the parable of the vineyard. And yet, for those who did believe, the reference would stand as a sharp rebuke.

We can now see Ruskin crafting a counter-politico-economic discourse resistant to the moral logic of Victorian capital and complicit religious inputs. In one of the most moving passages of *Unto This Last*, Ruskin intensifies his critique, arguing that

the mistake of the best men through generation after generation, has been that great one of thinking to help the poor by almsgiving, and by preaching of patience or of hope, and by every other means, emollient or consolatory, except the one thing which God orders for them, *justice*.

(17:60, my emphasis)

Here Ruskin critiques an evangelical approach to poverty that merely palliates suffering without acknowledging the cause in a fundamentally unjust system: indeed, “proceedings may be legal which are by no means just.” For Ruskin, this more radical approach is not simply more moral or holy but also more practical, since “in order to grow rich scientifically, we must grow rich justly” as well. Like affection, justice must be sought for its own sake in order for it to have a beneficial effect on economic affairs: there must be “jurisprudence” before “prudence” (17:62).

The mode of justice that Ruskin demands is not what people can claim in a purely proceduralistic legal sense; rather, he evokes an ethics of justice concerned first and foremost with right outcomes, rather than the formal processes available in theory to rights-bearing

individuals. In the parable of the vineyard, the wages paid by the owner do not reflect the hours worked—an “unjust” outcome, according to the conventional politico-economic view that regards pay as the result of an exchange for labor. Instead of the exchange value of labor, the parable accounts for the daily need of the workers, while strict justice is fulfilled by the contractual agreement of the earlier workers to accept the one penny wage.

A second crucial component of Ruskin’s postsecular understanding of justice is affection; specifically, “such affection as one man *owes* to another. All right relations between master and operative and all their best interest, ultimately depend on these” (17:28). Ruskin emphasizes the communal nature of his conception of justice with his invocation of the notion of “debt.” For Ruskin, affection is a condition of mutual debt, and he again appeals to Biblical sources: “Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another...” (Romans 8.7-8). All “right relations,” then, depend upon this affection — the Pauline ἀγάπῳ (*agape*): unconditional love.

In Ruskin’s formulation, affection subverts the calculus of economics, and does so in a very intriguing way. To illustrate, he gives the example of a master who takes on a servant, feeding and lodging him poorly, taxing him to the very limit just beyond which the servant would abandon his abusive post. This is the politico-economical view, as Ruskin sees it, which asserts that “by this procedure the greatest average of work will be obtained from the servant, and therefore the greatest benefit to the community, and through the community, by reversion, to the servant himself” (17:29). Ruskin argues that such would be the case, were the servant a machine, and his fuel something calculable, like steam or gravitation. However, one’s motive power is actually the *Soul*—something that fouls all the mechanical calculations that political

economy aspires to apply. Thus, for Ruskin, “The largest quantity of work will not be done by this curious engine for pay, or under pressure...It will be done only when the motive force, that is to say, the will or spirit of the creature, is brought to its greatest strength by its own proper fuel: namely, by the affections” (17:29-30).

In one sense, Ruskin appeals to a utilitarian logic like that espoused by J. S. Mill, arguing that the good rendered is ultimately maximized when the affections are appealed to.<sup>27</sup> Yet in Ruskin’s formation, such affection takes a decidedly religious bent in the form of the divine paradox. He states that “the affections only become a true motive power when they ignore every other motive and condition of political economy” (17:31). That is, only when the affections are sought for their own good will economic benefit accrue; simply done in a mercenary way, Ruskin argues, such machinations are certain to fail. Hence, “whoever will save his life shall lose it, whoso loses it shall find it” (Matthew 16.25). Once again, Ruskin applies a Christian aphorism directly to criticism of economics. Treating the servant kindly out of self-interest leads to ingratitude, yet treating him kindly “without any economical purpose” leads, ultimately, to the greatest return. Only when the affections are pursued for their own sake, rather than to satisfy an avaricious motive, can actual benefit accrue to all parties. For Ruskin, the basis for a political economy should not be individualized relations based avarice and ambition, but social relations based on justice and affection. Drawing on non-theistic as well as Christian sources Ruskin finds such relations at work in the leadership of the soldier, pastor, physician, and lawyer; he argues, in effect, that employment of wage labor should take the form of a professional service ethic animated by affection towards others.

For Ruskin, then, the issues of justice and affection are directed at a Victorian evangelical-capitalist assemblage that has favored the procedural over the personal, and the

expedient over the good. His use of the term justice is a keen, postsecular move. The idea would remind his Christian readers of their Biblical responsibility to “do justly, and to love mercy” (Micah 6.8), both of which were being ignored in favor of the evangelical emphasis on individual responsibility and self-help. At the same time, Ruskin challenged political economists to reconsider the costs their system incurred in terms of human flourishing, maintaining that justice was not incompatible with wealth. Far from being a simple idealist, Ruskin concludes that while absolute justice “is indeed no more attainable than absolute truth...as much justice as we need for all practical use is attainable by all those who make it their aim” (17:63-4).

### ***Wealth and “Illth” in a Postsecular Economy***

While Mill certainly acknowledges that political economy is limited in its purview, he is confident in his early writings that the exclusion of all concerns beyond wealth acquisition most nearly approximates the real order of economic affairs.<sup>28</sup> Ruskin, however, cannot agree with this assessment, insofar as he feels such an economics is not “political” at all, but merely “mercantile.”<sup>29</sup> He first seeks to answer political economists who would argue that “certain advantages of a general nature may be obtained by the development of social affections,” but that “Our science is simply the science of getting rich” (17:43). As we have already seen, Ruskin took exception to the idea of a political economy unconcerned with justice and social affections; but he also criticized the existing definition of “riches.” He first points out how riches, according to the understanding of political economists, are relative to another’s penury. As Ruskin explains: “The force of the guinea you have in your pocket depends wholly on the default of a guinea in your neighbor’s pocket. If he did not want it, it would be of no use to you; the degree of power it possesses depends accurately upon the need or desire he has for it” (17:44).

Such an understanding is better described as “mercantile economy, the economy of ‘merces’ or of ‘pay’” (17:44). As such, it measures the power over the labor of others one individual possesses. This Ruskin distinguishes from true “political economy”: “the economy of a State or of citizens” and which “consists simply in the production, preservation, and distribution, at fittest time and place, of useful or pleasurable things” (17:44). As ever, Ruskin chooses to define wealth in terms of the collective, rather than simply the individual. In Ruskin’s estimation, since the essence of wealth consists in authority over others, the nobler the persons and the greater the number, the more wealthy one can be considered. As such, he famously suggests that we consider humans themselves as the wealth, and that “perhaps...the final outcome and consummation of all wealth is in the producing as many as possible full-breathed, bright-eyed, and happy-hearted human creatures” (17:55). Through this reimagining of wealth, we can see Ruskin attempting to transform Victorian understandings of economy, based on his now-famous distinction between wealth and “illth.” Here, as in the parable of the vineyard, we can see Ruskin shifting the definition of economy away from exchange value, and towards a quantification of *human* value. In this sense, Ruskin attempts to define a “non-economic value”—i.e., “nobility”—*as* economic.

Ruskin is keen to emphasize that a system built on injustice cannot flourish long, or provide the greatest good for the greatest number, materially or otherwise. Further, what is required to produce healthy and happy-hearted creatures is not money alone, although a living wage is of paramount importance. What is important is that one’s work be meaningful, one’s position secure, and one’s treatment *just*. Ruskin concludes that while absolute justice “is indeed no more attainable than absolute truth...as much justice as we need for all practical use is attainable by all those who make it their aim” (17:63-4).

Ruskin's great observation is that from a purely mathematical perspective, commercial wealth gained through illicit means looks no different than that gained by responsible ones. This, for Ruskin, is a problem. Practically, economies based on fraud and chicanery cannot sustain themselves indefinitely due to the deteriorating impact of human nobility and sociality; and yet, as Ruskin points out, there is no recourse within mercantile economy beyond the *law* to restrain unethical cupidity.<sup>30</sup> The "idea that directions can be given for the gaining of wealth, irrespectively of the consideration of its moral sources," writes Ruskin, "is perhaps the most insolently futile of all that ever beguiled men through their vices" (17:53). In actuality, Ruskin argues, "every question concerning" the accumulation of wealth "merges itself ultimately in the great question of justice" (17:54).

With respect to wages, Ruskin argues that "It is easier to determine scientifically what a man ought to have for his work, than what his necessities will compel him to take for it" (17:68). We cannot know with certainty what financial situation a person is in, in order to pressure them to accept the lowest wages possible. But we can know for certain the cost of living, and can pay a person based on this amount. As in his attempts to redefine economy based on human value, Ruskin here seeks to subvert the politico-economic maxim that paying less is always better. By analyzing the problem from a more holistic perspective, Ruskin argues that the cost of living is both a more transparent and more just metric for determining price than simply allowing the mysterious workings of the market to determine the lowest wage that will still command the labor power of workers. In essence, Ruskin posits that if we value justice we will pay laborers according to their worth and their needs, rather than extort their work from them at the lowest possible rate.

In Ruskin's final chapter, he returns to this idea of wealth, taking on Mill and Ricardo most directly, as he challenges their conceptions of "value," "price," and "production." He accuses Mill of smuggling moral considerations into the science of political economy. In *Principles of Political Economy* Mill contends that idea of politico-economic "value" always refers to value in exchange. For Ruskin, this focus on exchange means that political economy's judgment of the utility of a thing depends on the human disposition towards it. This troubles Ruskin on two accounts. First, as the notion of nobility as an alternative economic value implies, Ruskin dislikes the notion that things have no inherent value, outside of what humans attach to them. Yet another way of thinking about value in non-exchange terms is to distinguish wealth that avails to life from that which leads to death—the difference between a plough and a bayonet is an example Ruskin commonly refers to. Political economy has no means of distinguishing between these two items, apart from their exchange value, and is thus unable to measure the effects of their subsequent consumption. This brings Ruskin to his second point: political economy has no interest in educating consumers. Consumption is only of interest to the science of economy as an endpoint for production; classical political economy can have nothing to say about the types of products consumed, nor the uses to which they are put.

True wealth, Ruskin suggests, should be measured as the aggregation of valuable commodities placed in the hands of valiant possessors. Like the production of non-valuable commodities, unused wealth, or wealth used poorly is a species of "illth." The only means of creating profit in Ruskin's postsecular economy is through labor, not exchange, which merely determines *price*. According to Ruskin, exchange, much like pay, should be governed by justice and nobility, rather than by simply extorting the highest possible price the consumer, fueled by

demand, is willing to pay. Any gain on one side leads necessarily to a loss on the other. In this way Ruskin emphasizes the *responsibility* embodied in exchange.

In an attempt to appeal to evangelical readers who are keen to emphasize the personal dimensions of ethics, Ruskin addresses the notion of individual responsibility. With respect to his understanding of economic harmony, he argues that “all effectual advancement towards this true felicity of the human race must be by individual, not public effort” (17:111). By this he does not mean that consumption and economy are not public concerns. His point is rather that economy should begin at home, a message that rings with the pun of the ancient Greek compound, *οἰκονόμος* (“household”), from which the word “economy” derives. Ruskin takes this etymology very seriously, and distills his basic theory of household economy into four principles which, if followed, would make for a just economy:

In all buying, consider, first, what condition of existence you cause in the producers of what you buy; secondly, whether the sum you have paid is just to the producer, and in due proportion, lodged in his hands; thirdly, to how much clear use, for food, knowledge, or joy, this that you have bought can be put; and fourthly, to whom and in what way it can be most speedily and serviceably distributed: in all dealings whatsoever insisting on entire openness and stern fulfillment...the sum of enjoyment depending not on the quantity of things tasted, but on the vivacity and patience of taste (17:113-4).

One might say that *Unto This Last* is summed up in these four injunctions to good consumption.<sup>31</sup> In replacing the avaricious and atomized human subject codified by political economy with a just, affectionate and collectively embedded human subject, Ruskin sought to transform the notion that economic concerns were of solely private interest into an understanding of economy that considered social relations and public good at every level.

Throughout, Ruskin's essays are a resounding call for an ethical economy. By his consistent appeals to both sides of the Victorian evangelical-capitalist resonance, Ruskin demonstrates his belief that the assemblage held within it the resources needed to transform Victorian political economy. Further, from his analysis of "illth" to the cultivation of justice and affection, Ruskin recasts politico-economic arguments to support a metrics of utility that extends beyond narrow definitions of economics, and which is defined in a human register that is partly spiritual. In doing so, Ruskin demonstrates his commitment to a postsecular frame that enjoins Christian perspectives. Akin to the most compelling forms of postsecularism today, Ruskin recognizes the potential in framing the stakes of his argument in terms that appeal both to the logic of economics and the logics of Christianity broadly defined. He can therefore hold both Christianity and political economy to stricter account for their failures to live up to their own professed standards (godliness and wealth) by creating a just system. The question of the degree to which this postsecular frame distinguished him from his primary adversary of the book, J. S. Mill, forms the basis for the following section.

### ***J. S. Mill and the Limits of Secularism***

While Ruskin's *Unto This Last* was written as a direct attack on Mill's influential account of political economy, the two thinkers share much in common. For one, much of Mill's later work on economics began to shift away from support of laissez-faire and toward support for trade unions (Hilton, *Age of Atonement* 267). In doing so, Mill aligned his economic thinking much more closely with Ruskin's own position. At the same time, both thinkers share surprising similarities with respect to religion as well.

The preponderance of writing about Mill and religion concerns his energetic discussion of the “religion of humanity.”<sup>32</sup> To be sure, his writings on religion evoke a humanistic quasi-religion that emerged out of the positivism of August Comte (1798-1857), and was embraced to some degree by contemporaries such as George Eliot, George Henry Lewes, and, at one point, even Ruskin himself.<sup>33</sup> Described by Andrew Wernick as “post-theistic” (8), Comte’s religion sought to retain the moral and political functions of Christianity—including its systems of public worship, prayers and sacraments—while replacing its theology with positivism, and its object of worship with humanity itself.

Although Mill certainly took Comte’s writings seriously, as his 1865 book *Auguste Comte and Positivism* suggests, his own work takes a decidedly different approach to religion’s purported eclipse by science. Mill attempts to reconcile the demands of religion and scientific reason, rejecting the narrative of religion’s inevitable and necessary decline espoused by Comte and echoed in modern secularization narratives. Indeed, wittingly or otherwise, much current postsecular thinking is indebted to Mill’s work. By turning to *On Liberty* (1859) and his posthumously published *Three Essays on Religion: Nature, The Utility of Religion, and Theism* (1874), we can see the value that he places on a postsecular mode of thought—one that recognized the utility of both religious and non-religious moral systems, and posited that an embrace of both is necessary and good.

Written during the period between the first publication of the *Principles of Political Economy* in 1848, and *On Liberty* in 1859, the first two of Mill’s essays on religion—“Nature” and “The Utility of Religion”—are concerned primarily with examining the most common arguments for supernatural religions such as Christianity. The timing of the essays’ composition is key. The themes of individuality and liberty permeate the essays, not surprisingly, and form

the basis for Mill's logical examination of religion. At the same time, we can clearly see the influence of his interests in the political and economic informing and being informed by his investment in religious debates.

The primary object of critique in "Nature" is "natural theology." Mill's goal is to demonstrate that argument from nature (or, "design") is insufficient as either evidence of an omnipotent Creator or as a standard of human morality. His case rests partly on the claim that "the order of nature, in so far as unmodified by man, is such as no being, whose attributes are justice and benevolence, would have made, with the intention that his rational creatures should follow it as an example" (383). Despite the pessimism towards the transcendent that characterizes "Nature," his next essay, "The Utility of Religion," begins with a claim that might surprise the casual reader of Mill:

It is...perfectly conceivable that religion may be morally useful without being intellectually sustainable: and it would be a proof of great prejudice in any unbeliever to deny, that there have been ages, and that there are still both nations and individuals, with regard to whom this is actually the case. Whether it is the case generally, and with reference to the future, it is the object of this paper to examine. (405)

Mill's controversial statement lays the groundwork for some of the stronger postsecular claims of *On Liberty*, as will be seen momentarily. In the passage above, Mill anticipates a key aspect of postsecular thinking like William Connolly's: one need not personally hold a religious belief to recognize that religious ideas may be useful (or even necessary) to articulating a moral framework. Mill recognizes that the beneficial ethical effects of religion—"reverenc[ing]...the weak and humble" and "the precept of doing as we would be done by" (416)—have set the stage for the civilized society he values, even though their supernatural components are no longer necessary. Now that the principles are in place, however, they are safely lodged within the public

imagination, and so, Mill argues, will not likely be lost. While Mill's own choice is the decidedly naturalistic religion of humanity, he leaves open the possibility that other modes of religious being could satisfy this human need of consolation. Clearly, Mill is not a secularist in the conventional sense. By *On Liberty* however, we can see an even greater shift towards acknowledging the indebtedness of modern ethics to religion.

Typically overlooked in discussions of Mill and religion, *On Liberty* is in many ways a powerful argument for postsecularism. From the beginning, Mill's most famous work finds the foundations of liberty in the Protestant reformation. It is on that religious "battlefield, almost solely," he claims, "that the rights of the individual against society have been asserted on broad grounds of principle, and the claim of society to exercise authority over dissentients openly controverted" (7). Mill here prefigures modern genealogies of secularism which locate the birth of Enlightenment reason on just this Protestant break from Catholic authority. Yet, Mill avoids the fallacy that ascribes to this moment the waning of religion's influence. Rather, religious toleration represents the inauguration not of secularism *tout court*, but of the mutual constitution of faith and reason in shaping modern forms such as separation of church and state and "liberty" more generally.

Of course, *On Liberty* has conventionally been read as an outright critique of religion, as when Mill deprecates church authority and adherence to dogma. However, Mill's true target is *unexamined* religion—along with all uncritically-held opinions. As he argues, "The beliefs which we have most warrant for have no safeguard to rest on but a standing invitation to the whole world to prove them unfounded" (20). This dialogical approach to confirming the validity of ideas need not necessarily rule out religious belief, but it would insist on paring away from religion those aspects that survive purely as tradition or custom. Even the founder of Christianity

was falsely accused of blasphemy, Mill points out, because the ruling religious leaders of the day could not examine their own understanding of heresy. Mill's appeal to Protestant cultivation of intellect and judgment thus requires that the very same critical attitude be applied to settled doctrines.

For Mill, the Christian moral tradition—and the sayings of Christ in particular—can be folded into a non-theistic ethics. Although Christianity alone (like any other single strand of ethics) is insufficient to meet the demands of liberty, Mill argues, neither should non-religious systems of morality ignore the insights that Christianity offers. Importantly, Mill also alludes to both pagan and Islamic sources of morality, even while his primary context is the Christian one. In his most compelling argument for what I am calling his postsecular position, Mill states:

I much fear that by attempting to form the mind and feelings on an exclusively religious type, and discarding those secular standards (as for want of a better name they may be called) which heretofore coexisted with and supplemented the Christian ethics, receiving some of its spirit, and infusing into it some of theirs, there will result...[a] servile type of character...incapable of rising to or sympathizing in the conception of Supreme Goodness. I believe that other ethics than any which can be evolved exclusively from Christian sources *must exist side by side with Christian ethics* to produce the moral regeneration of mankind...It is not necessary that in ceasing to ignore the moral truths not contained in Christianity men should ignore any of those which it does contain. (48-9, my emphasis)

His argument here emphasizes a shared intellectual inheritance that comprehends religious and non-religious sources. In doing so, Mill vitiates both position's claims to independence, removing the grounds for sole moral authority, while maintaining the need for, in Habermas's words, "complementary learning processes" ("Notes") undergirded by mutual recognition.

Turning briefly to Mill's final work on religion, "Theism," written sometime between 1868 and 1870, we can see many of these same themes, with the addition of a surprisingly sympathetic attitude towards the possibility of a supernatural deity and an afterlife. While his seeming acceptance of the possibility of the supernatural exasperated many of his supporters, "Theism" can be read as a subtle shift in what I have been calling his primary postsecular argument. Mill's main problem with Christianity can be distilled into the concept of an omnipotent Creator:

what is morally objectionable in the Christian theory of the world, is objectionable only when taken in conjunction with the doctrine of an omnipotent God: and (at least as understood by the most enlightened Christians) by no means imports any moral obliquity in a Being whose power is supposed to be restricted by real, though unknown obstacles, which prevented him from fully carrying out his design. (469)

A humanized deity provides none of the same obstacles to Mill as does one who would knowingly send his creations to hell. Both Connolly and Mill can accept a God who is bound by the same moral decisions and limitations of foresight that we as humans are subject to. However, in a startling concession, while discussing Christ's claims to divinity, Mill suggests that "there is nothing so inherently impossible or absolutely incredible in this supposition as to preclude any one from hoping that it may perhaps be true" (481). While Mill is adamant that this remains simply a hope and nothing that evidence can corroborate, his statement remains a surprising gesture of conciliation from a man who regarded, in Basil Willey's words, "any established Church...with the greatest abhorrence" (144).

While Ruskin's opposition to Mill's economic writing is a matter of record,<sup>34</sup> the differences between them on matters of faith and reason are not as great as one might imagine. As P.D. Anthony notes, the values Ruskin demanded "were rational values, (and) their

abandonment would mean death, physical or spiritual” (145). Yet, like Mill, Ruskin articulates these values within a postsecular frame that acknowledges the potentially redemptive power of religious imagery. Ruskin and Mill thus reach comparable postsecular conclusions from different starting points: Ruskin from the position of belief inculcated from youth, a waning of faith, then the acknowledgement of its usefulness and in fact justice; Mill from the position of *unbelief* inculcated from youth to his own crisis of faith in the efficacy of Benthamism, followed by the recognition that religion and modernity were all along mutually constitutive.

Perhaps the most important similarity between the two thinkers is that Ruskin and Mill were both expert diagnosticians of the times in which they lived, realizing the persistent importance of religious thought, and the need to recognize this persistence in order to provide effective criticism of mid-Victorian society. Such a perspective, I have argued, is likely to be necessary for any full understanding of the function of capital today. As Connolly’s work implies, to misunderstand the role of religion in fueling capitalism—neglecting their resonance—is to misunderstand both the culture in which the battle takes place, as well as the possible tools needed to resonate differently.

## Chapter 3:

Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* and the Possibilities of a Postsecular Cosmopolitan Critique

“And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs...”

- Genesis, Chapter 15

In *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson famously posits a trajectory from communities of religious and dynastic rule to the modern nation-state.<sup>3</sup> Framing his discussion of this evolution, he proclaims in no uncertain terms that, “in Western Europe the eighteenth century marks not only the dawn of the age of nationalism but the dusk of religious modes of thought.... What was then required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning” (11). While careful to deny that the advent of nationalism was *produced* by waning religious faith, Anderson plots a course of modernity in which the “decomposition” of religion paves the way for a new conception of community-formation based on the nation-state. Anderson’s influential account thus parallels that of the traditional secularization thesis, which, as Charles Taylor has put it, conflates modernity with “the dissipation of certain unsupported religious and metaphysical beliefs” (“Two Theories” 28).

Anderson’s narrative, like the secularization thesis, has greatly influenced recent criticism on the nineteenth century—criticism which often does not account for the ways that religion continued to play a central role in the Victorian construction of British nationalism. I argue that while historicist accounts have tended to downplay its influence on virtually all aspects of Victorian life, religion offered for Victorian authors like Charlotte Brontë a substantial challenge

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<sup>3</sup> An earlier version of this chapter appeared as “Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* and the Possibilities of a Postsecular Cosmopolitan Critique” in the *Journal of Victorian Culture* 18.1 (2013). Sections are reprinted here with the permission of Taylor and Francis.

to their conceptions of national and transnational identity and community. In what follows, I argue, somewhat controversially, that religion provided a potential means of mediating burgeoning nationalism and international rivalry. I turn to the religious context surrounding, framing, and comprising Charlotte Brontë's last published novel, *Villette* (1853), in order to understand how the work navigates the fraught ideas of community and nationhood.

In retrospect, it seems almost impossible that Brontë could have avoided writing about religion in a book so invested in the imagination and construction of community and Englishness, coming at the particular moment it did. The religious conflict that formed a historical backdrop to the writing of the novel bore grave implications for the Church in England, as well as the body politic. Already ablaze from the Protestant reaction to Catholic Emancipation (1829) and the Oxford Movement of the 1830s and 40s, England's religious controversy was compounded by Irish immigration as a result of the potato famine of 1845, during the decade of which 1.5 million Irish Catholics emigrated to England and the United States.<sup>35</sup> The threat of increasing national division over religion was thus exacerbated by the reaction against the "Papal Aggression" of 1850, in which the reinstatement of a Catholic hierarchy in England further polarized English Protestants and Catholics both at home and abroad.<sup>36</sup> It was in this context that *Villette* took up the issue of religion, in a central plot concerning a cross-cultural experience between England and Labassecour, the fictional country that scholars have traditionally read as representing the Belgium of Brontë's own pensionnat experience.

Crucial to *Villette* are the obstacles and potential avenues attending its heroine Lucy Snowe's adherence to her Protestant faith. Indeed, many of the most important scenes of the novel—as well as most of Lucy's key relationships—cannot be rightly understood apart from the influence of her religious convictions. At the same time, however, I argue that the novel can be

read not only as an analysis of the challenges of community-formation in a religiously diverse context, but also as a radical attempt to think beyond cultural and national boundaries to imagine the possibilities and complications of a trans-national community. In suggesting this, I read against the grain of a rather large body of criticism that takes as a given the vehement anti-Catholic tone of *Villette*. Such criticism offers extremely limited explanations for Brontë's surprising union between the staunchly Protestant Lucy Snowe and the equally devoted Catholic schoolmaster M. Paul Emanuel, not to mention Lucy's fascination with—and experimental participation in—Catholic ritual. In response, I argue that the novel can be understood on one level as Lucy's search for relational engagements which can, and must, accommodate her deeply held Protestant Christian beliefs. On another level, the narrative rehearses the manifold difficulties facing a cosmopolitan project that cannot ignore the obstacles, or the potential bridges, that religion represents. Here, the novel restricts itself to an exploration of interdenominational strife that excludes consideration of other faith traditions.<sup>37</sup> Rehearsing the possibilities of a cosmopolitan pluralism informed by national, cultural and religious difference, *Villette* thus offers potential, if limited, solutions to the seemingly intractable alterity that religious difference represents.

### ***The New Cosmopolitanism and the Challenge of Religion***

Flush with optimism following the end of the Cold War, many American and European scholars openly speculated about the possibilities of a Kantian perpetual peace.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, recent developments in communication technology, combined with a proliferation of transnational migrations, have made it possible to truly imagine and experience “Navigating beyond one's state.”<sup>39</sup> Many have returned with renewed vigor to theories of cosmopolitanism, spurred on by

studies such as Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins's *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (1998). As Amanda Anderson explains in her contribution to the volume, such cosmopolitanism "endorses reflective distance from one's cultural affiliations, a broad understanding of other cultures and customs, and a belief in universal humanity" (267). Interest in revisiting and rethinking cosmopolitanism has led many to cast a backwards glance at the nineteenth century, to find that Victorian conceptions of cosmopolitanism were often of a very different tenor from the so-called "new cosmopolitanisms" currently on offer.

Less sanguine than critics today, Victorian attitudes toward cosmopolitanism were inflected by an increasing ambivalence toward imperialism and globalizing capital, as Lauren M.E. Goodlad's recent analysis of Anthony Trollope's notion of "foreign policy" demonstrates (449). An awareness of this nineteenth-century caution might temper present-day enthusiasm for cosmopolitanisms blinkered to their historical relationship with capital. Further complicating the issue was the Victorian tendency to see Englishness as also encompassing its "others," and thus distinct from and superior to them: a "pseudocosmopolitan inclusion and simultaneous exclusion of the other" that Vlasta Vranjes calls "cosmopolitanism as nationalism" (326).

In addition to these caveats, recent discussions of cosmopolitanism have often neglected to address religion in any systematic way, suggesting that "[p]erhaps the enlightened assumption is that a cosmopolitan person has to transcend religious tradition and thus be secular" (van der Veer 170). José Casanova arrives at a similar conclusion in an essay revisiting his seminal work, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994), arguing that "In most cosmopolitan accounts, religion either does not exist or it is 'invisible'" ("Public Religions Revisited" 119). Craig Calhoun contends that such reluctance or ambivalence on the part of contemporary cosmopolitanism is inherited from a liberal rationalist tradition suspicious of "religion and rooted

traditions” (100).<sup>40</sup> To be sure, religious fundamentalisms have historically been both cosmopolitan in aspiration and often intolerant in practice, flummoxing the liberal democratic picture that the new cosmopolitanisms imagine. Indeed, Kwame Anthony Appiah has recently categorized neofundamentalisms like Al Qaeda as “counter-cosmopolitans” (*Cosmopolitanism* 137) and as “toxic cosmopolitans” (*Ethics* 220).

Such observations seem to cast doubt on whether religion can be squared with cosmopolitanism. Must religion continue to be bracketed from the public sphere in an effort to domesticate and manage the competing claims of various faiths? I suggest that the answer can be found in the insights of a postsecular view. In doing so I build on the work of John McClure, who discusses his own conception of “postsecular cosmopolitanism” through a reading of Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* (1992). While I share his view of cosmopolitanism as representing a community not based on tradition or blood but on a shared faith, my understanding of what constitutes the postsecular differs markedly. McClure argues that postsecular texts (which he traces back to the Romantic movement) do not offer deliverance “from worldliness into well-ordered systems of belief,” but rather leave their protagonists “in the ideologically mixed and confusing middle zones of the conventional conversion narrative,” where they are, surprisingly, comfortable (4).

While the “postsecular” as I understand it certainly includes this “negatively capable” tradition, it also encompasses a wide spectrum of belief ranging from fundamentalist religiosity to active doubt. Texts can thus be read as postsecular in the sense that they share a background of modernity that has all along influenced, and has itself been shaped by, religious belief and practice. Such a perspective not only helps to fill gaps in cosmopolitan theory, but contributes to a deeper understanding of Brontë’s novel, helping us to make sense of the most troubling and

intense moments of the narrative: interactions and clashes between religious adherents—moments which secularist readings inevitably misinterpret.

### *Secularization and Pluralism*

By many accounts, pluralism and cosmopolitanism represent conflicting values. Cosmopolitans, drawing from a Kantian inheritance, typically emphasize the importance of universally-recognized human rights which can form the basis for transnational communities. As the historian David Hollinger has argued in the context of multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism is therefore traditionally more individualistic in approach, valuing multiple voluntary affiliations in a fluid and open way (3-4). In contrast, pluralists, inspired by “counter-Enlightenment” thinkers like Giambattista Vico and Johann Gottfried von Herder, are wary of the notion of universality and less pessimistic about the benefits of nationalism. In his study of Isaiah Berlin, John Gray describes the “value pluralism” which animates Berlin’s work as the idea that “ultimate human values are objective but irreducibly diverse, that they are conflicting and often uncombinable, and that sometimes when they come into conflict...are incommensurable” (1). Such an understanding can seem to stand in rather stark contrast to a more meliorist cosmopolitan view. Berlin himself was skeptical of the cosmopolitan project, having famously stated that “Like Herder, I regard cosmopolitanism as empty. People can’t develop unless they belong to a culture” (22). In what follows, however, I argue that the boundary between the cosmopolitan and pluralist positions need not be inviolable. More specifically, a serious consideration of the “new” or “agonistic” pluralism can help to bridge this divide, even as it can inform the new cosmopolitanism.

Two of the strongest proponents of the so-called new pluralism are Chantal Mouffe and William Connolly. Both have spent their careers sketching the contours of a pluralism influenced by postmodern thought and the pragmatic concerns of political interactions. Both also seek to reclaim a pluralist tradition that passes through John Rawls (among many others), taking exception to Rawls's arguments for the privatization of difference, albeit in different ways. For Mouffe, Rawls's acknowledgment of "the fact of pluralism" while true, rings hollow when the solution is simply to deal with difference at a procedural level, resulting in the relegation of pluralism to the private sphere (*Democratic Paradox* 19).<sup>41</sup> Connolly approaches this same perceived deficit in Rawls's thinking, from the angle of secularism. For Rawls, the secularization (or, "de-essentialization") of faith necessary for the "reasonable pluralism" that he imagines involves three aspects: the separation of church and state, the disconnection of belief "(but not its symbolic expression) from devout enactments and ritual performances," and the formation of a consensus on public justice which appeals to a diversity of faiths, while rising above them (*Pluralism* 60). This tripartite formation of Rawlsian secularism relies on two fundamental beliefs which Connolly challenges: the fully realized success of the Westphalian accord with respect to secularization and the possibility of dissociating belief from practice. Indeed, these points of difference form the foundation of the postsecular, new pluralist position which Connolly espouses.

As Talal Asad argues in his *Formations of the Secular* (2003), secularists like Rawls overestimate the degree to which Christianity has been privatized successfully. While it is true that the differentiation of social spheres has largely led to the separation of church and state, Connolly and Asad emphasize the porousness of the boundary between private belief and public reason. This complicates the very "fact" of pluralism which Rawls imagines—a pluralism which

depends on the ability to privatize one's religious beliefs. Rawls' argument also overlooks the degree to which beliefs in general are composed and consolidated by practice and ritual, and incorrectly attributes to decision-making a cognitive purity it does not possess. As Connolly points out, the secularist's contention that there is an independent way of reaching public justice without recourse to diverse religious faiths conveniently elides the multiplicity of non-supernatural "faiths" which undergird the variety of "rational" instruments which are supposed to fill the role: "faith in the dictates of public reason...in deliberative consensus...in transparent procedures...in implicit contractual agreements...in a 'myth' of equality that citizens accept *as if* it were ontologically grounded" (*Pluralism* 59). For Connolly, these faiths—that is, convictions based on unrealized and imaginary, but eternally hoped-for, ideal political conditions—represent a lack of consensus no less than that found among religions, and are influenced by the dictates of embodiment and practice as much as they are by cognitive decision-making.<sup>42</sup> In response, rather than distinguishing between religion and secular reason, postsecularists like Connolly encourage us to expand our thinking about the kind of pluralism which has come to mark our twenty-first century experience. Embracing this "new pluralism" means transforming our drive to a consensus on justice *above* contending faiths into a "positive ethos of engagement between multiple constituencies who bring chunks and pieces of their faiths with them into the public realm" (*Pluralism* 60).

What can such a postsecular perspective contribute to discussions of the new cosmopolitanism? First, by complicating the secularist picture, postsecularism helps to relax the cosmopolitan suspicion of religion noted by Calhoun. This is by no means a given; one can imagine an individual's recognition of the mutual constitutiveness of modernity and the religious resulting not in detente but recoil. There is perhaps something like this in Habermas's recent

calls for an alternative, secular source of flourishing to the Christian traditions informing our current discussions of human rights. But the acknowledgement of such mutuality can lead to the recognition that modernity does not represent the transcendence of faith, but rather a repurposing of it.<sup>43</sup> This recognition holds the possibility of transforming the relationship between religious believers and secularists from one of antagonism between enemies to agonism: a potentially positive struggle between adversaries who acknowledge the mutuality of their positions.

Mouffe's articulation of the democratic paradox is useful here. For Mouffe, democracy depends upon the irreconcilability of opposing positions, as the regulative ideal of a rational consensus bears within it the implicit desire for a society where pluralism itself would have been superseded (*Democratic Paradox* 32). The agonistically pluralist position which I am suggesting informs the postsecular one acknowledges difference as something not to be overcome, but to be continually contended with. This is a distinct departure from the bitter antagonism between "faith" and "reason" and is rendered less improbable by the postsecular recognition of mutual constitutiveness.

In addition to complicating secularism, a postsecular perspective helps to expand participation in the cosmopolitan project by removing the restriction against religious modes of expression from the list of tacit requirements. This is not to downplay the negative effects of religious fundamentalisms historically and their intolerant versions of cosmopolitanism, nor is it to accede to a relativism that has at times plagued the pluralist project.<sup>44</sup> Rather, it is to acknowledge the impossibility of completely bracketing faith-based affiliations, even as it means recognizing that religion has all along helped to shape the cosmopolitan project, both for good and ill. Furthermore, a postsecular perspective helps contribute to the broader understanding of cultures and customs which, as Amanda Anderson has suggested, form a critical part of the

cosmopolitan endeavor. As Peter Berger has suggested in studies like *The Desecularization of the World* (1999), our modern world is far more religious than has been traditionally imagined by secularists in the West. A postsecular cosmopolitanism takes seriously the fact that religion maintains a significant role in the lives of many with whom we would form communities; a role that many are unwilling (or, indeed, unable) to relegate to the private sphere. To ignore such a reality would only impoverish any potential dialogue in cosmopolitan encounters. More importantly for our purposes, however, what can such a postsecular cosmopolitan perspective offer toward a reading of Brontë's novel?

### ***Detachment and Anti-Catholicism in Vilette?***

In *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (2001), Amanda Anderson argues that scholarship on the Victorian period has misunderstood the role of critical distance, as it was understood in the nineteenth century. In Anderson's view, there has been a tendency, following the turn to a critique of the Enlightenment, to cast detachment as elitist and, thus, as an object of suspicion. Acknowledging the validity of such critiques, Anderson nonetheless seeks to recuperate the "progressive potentiality" of practices of detachment—which she aligns with modernity—that "aim to objectify facets of human existence so as to better understand, criticize, and at times transform them" (5,6). To do so, she identifies in the work of key Victorian writers a distinct ambivalence toward detachment, seeing critical distance as potentially useful for the self-reflexive cultivation of character, yet associated with "forms of alienation and rootlessness that accompanied modern disenchantment, industrialization, and the globalization of commerce" (4). Such ambivalence Anderson reads as

confirming both nineteenth-century concerns about the potential and perils of modernity and the validity of her case studies as explorations of the stakes involved in cultivating detachment.

Anderson argues that Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* underscores the importance of considering forms of detachment when dealing with nineteenth-century gender ideologies. Thus, the character of Lucy Snowe represents an examination of the various forms of detachment available in the mid to late Victorian period, both beneficial and damaging, while at the same time acting as a complex mirror for "the forms of surveillance, impersonality, and neutrality that marked Victorian discourses of femininity and professionalism" (48). Lucy navigates a complicated web of relations with both fellow Britons and non-Britons. In doing so, Lucy enjoys the pleasures of detached observation, even as she evades successive attempts by others to engage with her throughout the novel. Her relationship with M. Paul is taken to be one more instance in which Lucy manages her detached interactions with others—in this case, with respect to "work" (61).

Anderson's reading represents a view of the nineteenth century that postsecularism is keen to revise.<sup>45</sup> Anderson's understanding of detachment assumes that a disinterested rationality can mitigate the invidious attachments of nationality, gender ideologies, and religion. Accordingly, *Villette* rehearses the formation and enactment of a detachment which can subtract the calculations of self-interest from social interactions. This interpretation exemplifies a larger trend in recent criticism on the nineteenth century in which religious conflicts are taken as metaphors for national identity, expressions of modern disciplinary power, or arguments about the problems of "culture"—anything but actual disagreements about a faith through which individuals interpret and configure their interactions. In contrast, a postsecular view does not concede that religious difference can be overcome either through simple relativism or by escape

to a realm of reason beyond the influence of faith. A postsecularist reading, therefore, might see the novel as representing a struggle to engage in a cosmopolitan context with adherents of a faith no less strongly held than one's own, compounded by the perceived cultural differences layered onto religious practice. What such a perspective on the nineteenth century lacks in terms of offering a clear-cut solution to the problem of alterity, it gains in descriptive power, particularly in the case of Brontë's novel. As the historical context surrounding the novel reveals, to ignore the role of religion in the novel is to impoverish our understanding of the narrative, its aims, and the times to which it was responding.

The last of Charlotte Brontë's four novels, *Villette*, was published in 1853. It was composed in the immediate wake of the so-called "Papal Aggression" of winter 1850, which led to massive anti-Catholic sentiment in England that only began to recede as a major public issue well into the 1870s.<sup>46</sup> As D.G. Paz explains, the primal causes of the anti-Catholic backlash were Pope Pius IX's creation of a territorial hierarchy of twelve bishoprics, combined with the elevation of Nicholas Wiseman to first Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster (7). While it appears that neither the pope nor the new archbishop expected more than token protests from the British, they were grossly mistaken. A series of attacks on what was perceived to be Catholic aggression against the Anglican Church was launched in *The Times*. These salvos were responded to in a sermon by the Catholic convert John Henry Newman and a letter penned by Wiseman himself to be read in London chapels. Lord John Russell replied in turn, in an open letter to the bishop of Durham that claimed the greater threat was the Tractarians, who were "shepherding" members of the Church of England to "Roman mummeries of superstition" (Paz 10). These pronouncements and counter-pronouncements culminated in nation-wide protest meetings, which occurred during

the last two months of 1850, against “Popery” and the perceived aggression of the Catholic Church against English liberty.<sup>47</sup>

Such an outburst, if surprising to Catholic authorities, was hardly shocking in the history of English affairs. And yet, the nineteenth century saw a revival of anti-Catholic feeling almost unparalleled in British history. Therefore, it is not surprising that *Villette*, a novel interested in a cross-cultural experience between Britain and Labassecour/France, would find at its heart issues of religion and the conflict between varieties of Protestantism and Catholicism in particular. Not surprisingly, the bulk of scholarship on Brontë’s novel focuses on its anti-Catholic tenor as the ground for a variety of arguments. James Buzard suggests that a potential difficulty in reading the novel ethnographically is that Lucy Snowe “never does decisively unlearn her proclivity for regarding the Francophone Catholics among whom she lives in *Villette* as uncivilized savages” (247). While this observation is perhaps true to a degree, Buzard uses it to support his argument that Brontë was interested in concretizing cultural and religious difference between Protestants and Catholics. Only recently have readings, like Susan Griffin’s *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (2004), begun to acknowledge the degree to which Brontë’s novel offers sympathy towards Roman Catholicism along with its critique.<sup>48</sup> Diana Peschier also suggests that negative depictions of Catholicism in *Villette* can be read as part of Brontë’s literary, cultural and religious upbringing, and that she employed them in a stylistic manner, rather than as anti-Catholic rhetoric *per se* (139). Additionally, Marianne Thormälen shows that Brontë’s distaste for Catholicism can further be read as a symptom of her regard for “reason,” “common sense,” and “spiritual liberty” over rigid church formations of either dogma or practice (38). While such readings are important correctives to the tradition of reading the novel as simply another anti-Catholic polemic, *Villette*’s approach to religion is much more nuanced.

Key scenes of religious encounter move beyond the simple Protestant/Catholic, English/French oppositions so often emphasized, in addition to suggesting the diversity of Protestantisms themselves, to examine the challenges and potential bridges that religious belief can represent in cosmopolitan contexts.

In addition to focusing myopically on the anti-Catholic aspects of the novel, influential readings like Rosemary Clark-Beattie's "Fables of Rebellion: Anti-Catholicism and the Structure of *Villette*" (1986) too easily align Catholicism with Belgium/France and Protestantism with England.<sup>49</sup> Such readings often ignore the religious diversity of Labassecour itself. As we are told in chapter 36, in addition to the Catholic churches, the town has "three Protestant chapels" representing three distinct denominations, each of which Lucy visits in turn. Nonetheless, the anti-Catholic assumption leads critics to see the Brettons and other English characters as part of "Protestant society" (831), in contrast to the "Catholic society" of Labassecour, when in fact the Brettons never display the same level of devotion or seriousness towards their presumed Protestant faith that we see Lucy demonstrating through her actions, numerous religious discussions, and constant Biblical references. Rather, the novel complicates the easy conflation of nation and religion, even as it acknowledges the considerable overlap between the two. Lucy herself acts as a dramatically ironic embodiment of this; she must wrestle with the same conflationary tendency—as must M. Paul—in order to forge real community and a meaningful relationship. Importantly, religious devotion and openness become the means by which their relationship is resolved, despite the fact, if we are to accept Buzard's reading, that Lucy never fully comes to embrace the cultural difference that Labassecour represents.

My point is not to deny the decidedly mutual influence that nationalism and religion bear toward one another. Rather, I want to emphasize how secularist readings of religious belief often

overlook the ways in which religion can, and does, serve to promote cosmopolitanism. Instead of representing instances of detachment or opportunities to reaffirm her Englishness, Lucy's religious encounters, such as the confessional scene and M. Paul's attempts to convert her, embody a search for engagement and transnational connection, even as they suggest the paramount importance of religious belief to her decision-making processes: processes informed by reason and affect in equal and often competing measure.

***Stranger in a Strange Land: Lucy in Labassecour***

In the introduction to their edited collection, *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel* (2002), Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever consider the novel as a trans-channel creation, while at the same time addressing its vexed nature as a project of national identity-formation. They take up the concept of the “cross-Channel literary zone” (2)—seen as a version of the Bourdieuvian cultural field—and focus on the many formal and informal factors which contributed to the material and symbolic production of the modern novel. Interestingly, religion is a completely unacknowledged aspect of the zone in Cohen and Dever's analysis. This is particularly surprising given that religion, historically, has been one of the most influential factors not only in national identity-formation but also on the inter-national cultural field. In what follows, I consider religion as a central aspect in both the formation and the content of the cross-Channel novel, and take up *Villette* as a prime example. Marina MacKay has already suggested ways of thinking about the development of the novel as being influenced by Catholicism, countering what she sees as the unexamined assumption of the English critical tradition that the novel is a Protestant form. Despite the fact that her reading of *Villette* follows the traditional “sensational” rendering of Catholicism in order to throw her argument into greater relief,

MacKay's reading, much like my own, emphasizes the discursive effects of religion on the production of novels and on the work these novels do. Close attention to the character of Lucy Snowe reveals how religion shapes and directs her search for community and engagement in a trans-Channel setting, and how this process forms the basis for the novel's larger examination of the possibilities of a postsecular cosmopolitanism.

Early in *Villette*, Lucy experiences an encounter that subtly prefigures all of her subsequent relationships and, indeed, the trajectory of the novel. Paulina Home, recently motherless, is sent to live with Lucy and the Brettons while her father travels to recover from the loss of his wife. Detached and sullen, Polly spurns all attempts at either conciliation or engagement. Lucy, attempting to paint for the reader a picture of Polly as *unheimlich*, describes an encounter with her late one evening.<sup>50</sup> Pleading "guiltless of that curse, an overheated and discursive imagination," Lucy nonetheless relates:

...when of moonlight nights, on waking, I beheld her figure, white and conspicuous in its night-dress, kneeling upright in bed, and praying like some Catholic or Methodist enthusiast—some precocious fanatic or untimely saint—I scarcely know what thoughts I had; but they ran the risk of being hardly more rational and healthy than that child's mind must have been. (12)

In the first of many Gothic scenes in the novel, Lucy describes Polly, who is later to become one of the shining examples of English femininity, as ghostly and "unearthly." While this scene certainly generates a Gothic frisson, Lucy's description of the moment is important and representative. Lucy emphasizes that her reaction to Polly's preternatural appearance was *not* the product of an overactive imagination. Nevertheless, even as she characterizes Polly's prayer as unhealthy, she confesses that her own thoughts were no more "rational" than those she imagines her subject to entertain. This is the first appearance in the novel of the reason/imagination dyad—a trope that recurs throughout the narrative, especially in moments of emotional charge or

relational disquiet. For Gilbert and Gubar, this dyad represents Lucy's description of the conflict between self-repression and desire, while her conscious attempts to maintain "a sense of herself as separate from both forces" (411) lead to her victimization by both. Schiefelbein echoes this reading, arguing that Lucy's control over her own life depends on her realizing that "what she calls Reason and Imagination are both self-destructive concepts created by internalizing the oppressive voices of real people around her" (138). Against these and other readings, I argue that such moments of struggle represent not simply a battle with libidinal or social forces, but rather the narrator's deliberate staging of a conflict between traits aligned with Protestantism and Catholicism, both of which are examined in the larger context of a battle between knowledge and faith. This conflict and its resolution represent the heart of the novel, and characterize the postsecular cosmopolitanism the narrative examines.

Evident even in this early passage, we see Lucy setting her "rational" evangelical Low-Church Anglicanism over and against an "irrational" Catholicism read onto the penitent Polly. Particular in choosing even between Protestant denominations, Lucy lumps in dissenting Methodism with a Catholicism aligned with fanaticism and the uncanny.<sup>51</sup> This distinction appears again in a scene just after Lucy's arrival at the pensionnat which forms the backdrop for the bulk of the narrative. While Lucy has just related her self-exemption from evening prayers, she describes her experience sitting in on the students' personal evening study, during which time is set aside for readings from a book, we are told, about the exploits of Catholic saints. In no uncertain terms, Lucy describes this "lecture pieuse" as being "mainly designed as a wholesome mortification of the Intellect, a useful humiliation of the Reason" (116), meant to portray a life of piety and sacrifice to the young students.

While this scene certainly provides ample grist for the mill of anti-Catholic readings of the novel, I suggest it also performs a countervailing function. First, as much as the passage represents a typical Victorian indictment of Catholicism as anti-intellectual or irrational, it emphasizes the importance of Reason and Intellect as engaged parts of Lucy's own faith—or, at the very least, in her self-description of it. As important as her configuration of Anglican Protestantism against a caricature of French Catholicism is here, Lucy's attack on the latter bears a striking resemblance to modern-day scientific claims against religion in general—a perspective fully active in Brontë's own day. Against the impression of religion as somehow irrational or unintellectual, Lucy, in attaching such claims to Catholicism, does not so much malign the Catholic faith as she upholds the value of reason and critical self-reflection to her own. In this way the novel rehearses Lucy's self-understanding of the mutual constitutivity between faith and reason which Anglican Protestant Christianity represented, rather than staging a contest between them in a way that favors either religion or knowledge. Second, Lucy's reaction to what she perceives to be antithetical to her own beliefs models what a postsecular cosmopolitanism can look like in practice. While the lecture provokes a viscerally negative response in Lucy, she endures the lectures in silence, despite her intense (and, apparently, violent) desire to interrupt the proceedings. This to my mind represents two of the most critical aspects of the cosmopolitanism advocated by the novel: tolerance and curiosity. As we know from Lucy's later interactions with M. Paul and Père Silas, she is neither reticent nor timid when questioned on matters of faith. While she confesses a strong desire to interrupt the readings and lecture the irreligious listeners, in the manner of the Presbyterian Mause Headrigg of Sir Walter Scott's *Old Mortality* (1816),<sup>52</sup> her anger simply gives way to a quick, yet quiet, exit whenever the book appears henceforward. As for her curiosity, she suggests that she might even be willing

to pay to have the opportunity to have the book in her hands, to peruse at her leisure even once. Such curiosity could be dismissed as simply prurient, and yet she seems genuinely fascinated by the tales, and she is willing even to attempt the experience of confession.

The wide critical reaction to Lucy's confession to Père Silas has generally fallen into two camps: readings of the confessional as threatening and dangerous, or those arguing that Lucy's refusal to confess as a defiant moment of agency.<sup>53</sup> Despite these differences, all view the interaction (or conflict) between English Protestantism and French Catholicism to be productive for the workings of the novel. Such readings have also tended to indulge in the persistent, and not completely unjustified, temptation to conflate the biographical details of Brontë's life and experiences with those of her heroine.<sup>54</sup> We do know from a letter written to her sister Emily on 2 September 1843 that Charlotte, while in Brussels, did make her confession to a Catholic priest in the Cathedral of Ste. Gudule. In a scene strikingly similar to that in *Villette*, Brontë relates how she "took a fancy to change...into a Catholic and go and make a real confession to see what it was like." After admitting, like Lucy, that she "had been brought up a Protestant," she explains,

I was determined to confess, and at last he said he would allow me because it might be the first step towards returning to the true church. I actually did confess—a real confession. When I had done he told me his address, and said that every morning I was to go to the rue du Parc—to his house—and he would reason with me and try to convince me of the error and enormity of being a Protestant!!! I promised faithfully to go. Of course, however, the adventure stops there, and I hope I shall never see the priest again. (Smith 43-44)

In contrast with this rather banal and unremarkable account, the novel narrates Lucy Snowe's own confessional experience much more dramatically. Coming at the end of her first school year at Madame Beck's Pensionnat, and following a harrowing experience of loneliness and

exhaustion in caring for a *cretin*,<sup>55</sup> Lucy falls ill, after venturing far from the Rue Fossette “through fields, beyond cemeteries, Catholic and Protestant, beyond farmsteads, to lanes and little woods, and I know not where” (158). Shortly thereafter, she succumbs to the worst aspects of her illness, and is bedridden with fevers and delusions accompanied by a deep depression. Rejecting the aid of doctors, and believing her deep despair to be spiritual as much as physical, she escapes the dormitory to find solace. As always, Lucy frames her narrative with repeated appeals to the rationality of her actions, mentioning twice before describing the scene that her decision to seek out spiritual comfort was taken in the full apprehension of her faculties: she emphasizes that “I was in my sane mind” and that “I could not be delirious, for I had sense and recollection to put on warm clothing” (160). Before dismissing such claims as simply seeking to add the verisimilitude of truth to a sensational account, we should note that the passage intervening between the two appeals to rationality contains Lucy’s interpretation of events as being part of a religious trial, appointed by God. In doing so, she continues casting her narrative as a spiritual *Bildungsroman* in the style of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678). Early in her narrative, Lucy depicts her journey as a spiritual pilgrimage, in a seemingly innocuous aside in chapter one. There, Lucy mentions that her time with the Bretttons “resembled the sojourn of Christian and Hopeful beside a certain pleasant stream, with ‘green trees on each bank, and meadows beautified with lilies all the year round’” (6). In referencing Bunyan’s highly influential and widely-recognized work, Lucy suggests to her reader that, as in the allegory, her time with the Bretttons is only a necessarily brief stop for rest on what will ultimately be a trying journey to her final destination: the “Celestial City” of Bunyan’s story, but in Lucy’s case a place of recognition and engagement with another who can share her life and the seriousness with which she takes her religious beliefs. In this context, Lucy’s encounter in the confessional should

be understood not only as another trial which will test her Protestant faith, but one in which she learns or discovers something crucial to her own journey.

Important to such a reading is Lucy's admission early in the scene that, upon hearing and attending the tolling of a church bell during her escape from the pensionnat, "[a]ny solemn rite, any spectacle of sincere worship, any opening for appeal to God was as welcome to me then as bread to one in extremity of want." Kneeling with others on the stone pavement, Lucy notes that after the service, observing the process of confession, one penitent returns consoled. Upon being prodded "in a low, kind voice" by another unprepared parishioner to precede her to confession, Lucy obliges. She explains that "I knew what I was about; my mind had run over the intent with lightening-speed. To take this step could not make me more wretched than I was; it might soothe me" (161). Her emphasis, once more, of the rationality of her decision works a double purpose: it explains to the reader the reason for her unorthodox behavior (confessing to a Catholic priest), even while it seeks to reassure such readers that the decision was not made rashly, or out of some confusion or persuasion beyond the bounds of reason. The mention of intent seems to militate against readings of the ensuing confessional scene as an unconscious surrender of the self or as a threat to her sexual agency, even as these would have been widely accepted Victorian stereotypes of Catholic confession. Indeed, of the two actors in the confession, Lucy relates that it is her confessor, who we later learn to be Père Silas, who is taken unawares, and his questioning of her motives is attended by the adjectives "startled," "surprised," and "puzzled" (161). Lucy further complicates the typical anti-Catholic readings by describing Père Silas as having a "compassionate eye," and relating that her confession, "the mere relief of communication in an ear which was human and sentient, yet consecrated" had solaced and comforted her (162).

This is not to say that Lucy departs from her encounter with her mind changed about the Catholic faith; her parting words relate that while she remains grateful for Père Silas' assistance, she likes neither his Church nor its creed. While she leaves unconverted to Catholicism, and is in fact adamant in her belief about its temptations (toward which she confesses her own potential weakness), Lucy expresses her gratitude for his individual kindness. Importantly, for Lucy, this kindness must come in the form of religion. From her narration, we know the value that Lucy places on her religious belief, and the degree to which this forms a barrier to her engagement with those she daily interacts with. And yet, in her moment of greatest despair, that she willingly reaches out to a Catholic source demonstrates both the importance of religion to her psychic well-being and her acknowledgement that, despite their critical differences, Catholicism and Protestantism share a common aim.

Indeed, despite a long history of reading *Villette* as an anti-Catholic diatribe, one need look no further in the novel than the relationship between Lucy Snowe and M. Paul to see Brontë complicating the simple opposition between Protestant freedom and Catholic superstition, in addition to the opposition between English and French. Having left her native England to seek employment in Belgium, Lucy Snowe is immediately accosted by cultural and religious difference. This takes the form of oppressive surveillance associated with Roman Catholic rigor and Madame Beck, headmistress of the pensionnat at which Lucy is employed, and in her initial encounter of confession with the priest (Père Silas) who figures prominently in her later relationship with M. Paul. Lucy's encounters with Catholicism reveal both her distaste for "romish" pomp and oppression, as well as the enticing possibilities of all that is "tender, comforting and gentle in the honest popish superstition" (162) offered in her ailing state, when she needs it most—both of which she nonetheless distrusts. Over the course of their relationship,

it becomes clear that the religious differences between Lucy and M. Paul form the primary obstacle to the deepening of their mutual understanding, and their future union.

Late in the novel, we find M. Paul inveighing against what he perceives to be Lucy's "terrible, proud, earnest Protestantism" in the face of the gift of one kind of text—a religious tract—meant to soften her to his Catholic position (417). Importantly, she makes clear that she cannot respect the tract as a document of faith, being incommensurable with her understanding of the primal text of her belief, the Bible. However, surprisingly, in response to M. Paul's perception of Lucy's disrespect of the tract as tantamount to scorn, she replies:

"Monsieur, I don't scorn it—at least, not as your gift. Monsieur, sit down; listen to me. I am not a heathen, I am not hard-hearted, I am not unchristian, I am not dangerous, as they tell you; I would not trouble your faith; you believe in God and Christ and the Bible, and so do I."

"But do you believe in the Bible? Do you receive Revelation? What limits are there to the wild, careless daring of your country and sect? Père Silas dropped dark hints."

By dint of persuasion, I made him half-define these hints; they amounted to crafty Jesuit-slanders... At ease with him, I could defend my creed and faith in my own fashion; in some degree I could lull his prejudices. He was not satisfied when he went away, hardly was he appeased; but he was made thoroughly to feel that Protestants were not necessarily the irreverent Pagans his director had insinuated; he was made to comprehend something of their mode of honouring the Light, the Life, the Word; he was enabled partly to perceive that, while their veneration for things venerable was not quite like that cultivated in his Church, it had its own, perhaps, deeper power—its own more solemn awe. (418)

Here, Lucy attempts to forge common ground based on their mutual belief in God, Christ, and, most significantly, the Bible as essentials of their faiths.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the very point on which she denies the accusations of being hard-hearted, unchristian, dangerous, etc.—the group of ideals on which she denies the possibility of "troubling his faith"—is the classic Protestant triumvirate,

rather than any outward proof of her kind nature or works to demonstrate her generous spirit. Even more important are M. Paul's questions asked in direct response to Lucy's reassurances. By asking whether or not she believes *in the Bible*, and thus receives revelation, we find M. Paul implicitly, yet clearly, acknowledging the fundamental element common to their seemingly divergent beliefs. Furthermore, despite his reservations about the practices of her Protestantism, Lucy relates that M. Paul is made to see that their commonalities can be the basis for forming at least a provisional respect, with the potential for even greater mutual understanding. Lucy notes further that she "had no feverish wish to turn him from the faith of his fathers" (419), and no wish to convert herself. Despite "thinking Romanism wrong," she can nonetheless imagine a condition, which M. Paul fulfills, in which both Protestants and Catholics might retain their religious specificity, while sharing community.

When Lucy is then questioned about which particular sect of Protestantism she holds to and why, she responds again by asserting the Biblical text as final guide for her faith, and not tradition. She explains to M. Paul, unwaveringly, "that my own last appeal, the guide to which I looked, and the teacher which I owned, must always be the Bible itself, rather than any sect, of whatever name or nation" (419). This statement is significant, as it reveals both the ultimate authority of her belief, as well as that authority's supersession of either name or national attachment or origin, while offering the possibility that all the sects of Protestantism may be joined in "one grand Holy Alliance" on the basis of "the unity and identity of their vital doctrines" (419). Although Lucy cannot easily include Catholicism in her consideration of this ecumenical holy alliance, we can already begin to imagine the possibility of precisely this happening, drawing out by extension the exception granted to M. Paul. Here we can see most clearly Lucy's imagined community of the text—one that crosses boundaries of nation and

language, sect and discipline. The very real differences between Catholic and Protestant, Labassecourienne and English are in no way elided by the novel, and yet, in the last instance, we find Lucy and Paul forming an understanding based on mutual recognition of the validity of their faiths, based on a shared text.

This interaction, while only mentioned in passing by the majority of critics, is in the end important not only for the relationship between M. Paul and Lucy but, as I have been arguing, as a metaphor for the larger issues Brontë is addressing between Protestant and Catholic traditions—and by proxy England and France. In many ways then, for Lucy Snowe, and for Brontë herself, religious belief represents the means by which the possibility of an inter-national community might be imagined, even as it reinforces the influence that religion held as an obstacle to such community in the minds of the novel's Victorian readers. The commonality of text allows for a bold circumventing of both historical baggage and the attendant "unreasonable" feelings associated with what she perceives to be Catholic superstition and mummery. By stripping away what appear to Lucy to be inessentials from religious belief, she imagines a narrowing of commonality and common practices, yet a broadening of community on the basis of a unifying text. Brontë's discussion of the realm of religious difference is important, furthermore, because it engages with cultural identities already firmly codified as distinctive. France at the time being overwhelmingly Catholic, with right leaning reformers agitating for the development of even further connections between the Catholic Church and the state, her choice of religion suggests a way in which cultural identity might be preserved, while offering the possibility of a community not dependent upon shared cultural history or national membership.

### *Postsecular Possibilities*

In his contribution to *Religious Pluralism, Globalization and World Politics* (2009), Pratap Bhanu Mehta scrutinizes the notion of religious pluralism in modern liberal democracies. In doing so, he turns his attention to the complex relationship between religion and nationalism, arguing that

much of the investment of modern states in the religious-secular dichotomy—increasingly cast as a way of managing cultural and religious diversity—may exist because a focus on religion exempts secular movements like nationalism from political scrutiny. Indeed, the threats posed to a civil liberal order in India and elsewhere are less from disputes over religious beliefs and more from the conjunction of nationalism and religion. This makes religion a site of destructive passion. (87)

In making this argument about the dangerous combination of nationalism and religion, Mehta astutely notes the historical tendency for religion to be conflated with national identity, complicating pluralist possibilities. As discussed in a historical context above, and witnessed in *Villette*, the conjoining of English identity to Protestantism and French identity to Catholicism often made religion the source of fundamental conflict, which only exacerbated international antagonism. In such a conflation, the inherent irrationality of nationalism and the animosity over nationalities often bleed into a religious difference perceived as parallel, both in violence and conception. That is, as religious identities become increasingly associated with nations and traditions, what was a contingent relationship is transformed into a necessary or self-evident one. As Mehta suggests above, the modern solution to this tendency has been to emphasize the distinction between the secular nature of the state and the religious (or irreligious) nature of its inhabitants. While I am less eager to label nationalism a completely secular movement, I do agree that the recent attention paid to religion has been accompanied in most public fora by, in general, an exemption of nationalism from interrogation and a too-easy association between

religion and states. In this way, our current context has advanced surprisingly little from its nineteenth-century antecedent.

I have suggested that a postsecular cosmopolitan approach can offer a possible alternative to this quandary, and can help us to understand and appreciate the particular intervention that Brontë's *Villette* offers to this debate. For one, I argue that such a perspective helps us to take seriously the faith of Lucy Snowe as being more than simply an artifact of her Englishness, or an aspect of her inherited traditions. As Marianne Thormählen has put it, for many Victorians, "religion was literally a matter of life and death in a way few people in our time can understand" (7). While tragic events like 9/11 have seemed to render such a statement obsolete, the relevance and freshness of postsecularist interventions emphasize the degree to which religion and its relationship to the secular has only recently begun to receive the critical attention it deserves, particularly in a nineteenth-century context.<sup>57</sup> Understanding the centrality of religion to Lucy Snowe helps to correct readings of the novel which see her faith as separable from her cognitive processes or as merely one of the many influences which vie for her attention.

The novel's presumably tragic ending can in one sense be read as indicative of the insurmountability of cultural and religious difference. That in the end M. Paul relinquishes his attempts to convert Lucy, as she accepts his Catholicism and accepts his faith as genuine, suggests instead that intractable religious differences need not necessarily preclude cosmopolitan engagement—in fact, they can aid it. *Villette* can thus be seen as Brontë's gesture towards a reconciliation—a paving the way for an international community based upon, but certainly not limited to, religious belief. While neither M. Paul nor Lucy relinquishes a cultural or nationalist self-identification, with Lucy in particular retaining her Englishness to the end, their engagement (both literal and figurative) comes about not by a cosmopolitan mutual recognition of a shared

humanity, but rather through the a resolution of their religious difference, perceived by both to be the most significant obstacle to their union. Seen in this way, religion poses not only a potential obstacle to cosmopolitan recognition, but also a possible means by which a mutual respect for faiths, religious or otherwise, can overcome national and cultural differences held with respectively less fidelity. Recognizing this can help to correct modern misreadings of the narrative which assume religion to be less a crucial, or a more compartmentalizable aspect, of nineteenth-century cultural identity than was actually the case. This postsecular perspective can also help to correct the current belief that the modern world has overcome this perceived Victorian shortcoming, contributing to a cosmopolitanism more aware of the continuing role that religion plays in lives of many, even (and perhaps especially) in the West. Far from being disheartening, this realization should actually expand cosmopolitan possibilities, as a postsecular approach provides an awareness of an investment in the religious which could potentially be shared, which might be conflicting, but must be recognized as important to its adherents.

In the end, *Villette* not only describes but actually enacts a postsecular cosmopolitan approach. As Appiah has suggested, narrative itself can be both the place for imagining community and the very means by which community can be created. Rather than our shared beliefs or our capacity for reason, he argues that what makes the cosmopolitan experience possible for us is our “grasp of a narrative logic that allows us to construct the world to which our imaginations respond.... And the basic human capacity to grasp stories, even strange stories, is also what links us, powerfully, to others, even strange others” (*Ethics* 256-7). In its attention to texts of all kinds, from conversion tracts to books of martyrs, Brontë’s narrative demonstrates this process through Lucy Snowe even as it creates in us as readers a connection, an engagement, with a heroine whose own context, experiences, and religious convictions may be very different

from our own. This has the potential of perhaps doing the work in us which reading—combined with interactive efforts—does in Lucy's own development. Thus, even if a true cosmopolitan pluralism is only ever available through the imagined communities offered by fiction, this does not, perhaps, excuse writers like Brontë or thinkers like us from imagining and pursuing its realization in this world.

## Chapter 4:

## Matthew Arnold and the Question of Conduct

Die Religion selbst, wie die Zeit, wie Leben und Wissen, in stetem Fortschritt und Fortbildung begriffen ist.

[Religion itself, like time, like life and knowledge, is engaged in a constant process of advance and evolution.]

-Goethe

Not a having and a resting, but a growing and a becoming, is the character of perfection as culture conceives it; and here, too, it coincides with religion.

-from *Culture and Anarchy*

In his provocative study *Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion* (1993), John Maynard suggests that “It may well be that the only scandal that remains in the postmodern world is that of religious seriousness” (3). Anticipating Slavoj Žižek’s argument in *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (2003), Maynard’s dictum reveals how “secularization” has appeared to produce a certain irreversible cultural shift. This shift manifests itself in an irony toward religious belief in the face of allegedly superior paradigms for human experience—a movement away from transcendent revelation and tradition, and toward a modern understanding of empirical science and immanent rationality. To elucidate his particular take on “modernity,” Jürgen Habermas summons Max Weber, who “described as ‘rational’ the process of disenchantment which led in Europe to a disintegration of religious world views that issued in a secular culture.... To the degree that everyday life was affected by this cultural and societal rationalization, traditional forms of life...were dissolved” (*Philosophical Discourse* 1-2). In the face of such dissolution it seems that any lingering fidelity to religious belief must indeed be seen as vestigial, contrarian, and, perhaps worst of all, anti-modern.

In what follows, I will argue that the question, for Arnold, was not whether we will continue to have religion, but rather, *what kind* of religion will we have. Whether he was successful in answering this question remains for the reader to decide; nevertheless, without such a perspective, it is impossible to understand Arnold's body of work, from his early poetry to his later prose. Indeed, in the philosopher Charles Taylor's reading of Arnold's "Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse" (as with his reading of "Dover Beach"), he begins by acknowledging that the poem, in its depiction of the "impossibility of faith, whose departure has nonetheless left a great void" expresses a widely felt sentiment of both nineteenth-century Europe—one that continues today (*A Secular Age* 382). Taylor suggests that the loss of religious certainty was accompanied by a sense that something precious has been lost, something that the cold calculations of scientific rationality are inadequate compensation for.

This recognition helps us to understand what, precisely, Arnold was trying to accomplish in his later writings on religion like *Literature and Dogma* (1873), even if Taylor misreads Arnold's poetry. Despite this, Taylor's view of "secularity," its problems, and its surprising rewards, illuminate some of the most important aspects of Arnold's writing. In fact, the crisis of "secularization" has long interested Arnold scholars, including Nathan Scott and David DeLaura.<sup>58</sup> This essay seeks to build on such work, adding insights from current discussions of postsecularity, in order to offer a fuller picture of what the "Prophet of Culture" saw as the future of religion.<sup>59</sup>

### *A Secular Age?*

In *A Secular Age* (2007), Charles Taylor describes—in terms perhaps inescapably pedantic—his understanding of the three primary ways of conceiving of "secularity" as we understand it

today.<sup>60</sup> The first can be understood in terms of public spaces that “have been allegedly emptied of God, or of any reference to ultimately reality.” That is, the norms and principles we follow, the deliberations we engage in, and the actions that result are driven by the internal “rationality” of each sphere, compared with earlier periods in which “Christian faith laid down authoritative prescriptions” (2). This has also been called the retreat of religion from the public sphere. In contrast, a second understanding of secularity consists of the waning of religious belief and practice itself, often measured in terms of empirical data such as declining church membership. Often, this phenomenon is thought to result from increasing education and the consequent access to rational explanations for the heretofore unexplainable, which crowd out religious belief.

However, for Taylor, there is a more interesting and compelling third understanding, which he categorizes as “a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace” (3). In this mode of thinking, secularity thus describes a condition in which religious belief is no longer axiomatic and, as such, many feel bound to give it up, though they mourn its loss. In Taylor’s view, “This has been a recognizable experience in our societies, at least since the mid-nineteenth century” (3).

Taylor’s third definition of secularity complicates the conventional “secularization thesis,” which sees the gradual disappearance of religion to be ineluctable and absolute. His work is therefore “devoted not simply to criticizing the view that modernity inevitably marginalizes religion...but rather to explaining how conditions of secularity have come to shape both contemporary belief and ‘unbelief’ alike” (Warner et al. 5). Taylor’s view thus affirms the version of “postsecularism” which I have been suggesting motivated key nineteenth-century thinkers; that is, the awareness that modernity and religion are mutually constitutive.<sup>61</sup>

Taylor's narrative acknowledges the very real consequences of a process whereby, as one reviewer puts it, "the cumulative impact of the Reformation, Renaissance, Enlightenment and myriad scientific revolutions [made] it possible to think about the material world without reference to any transcendent power" (Jeffries). In Taylor's view, there is no going back from this reality. The "immanent frame" in which we now live, and have lived in for some time, is marked by the irrevocable contingency of the belief in transcendence.<sup>62</sup> Such a postsecularism does not necessarily entail the death of religion, though it does present challenges which can actually render belief or the search for deeper meaning less certain and even more precious.

To be postsecular in this way is to recognize that the movement toward rationalization, far from signaling the end of religion—and even, as some like Pecora have argued, coming out of religion—simply paved the way for the new kinds of religion available to people today, at least in the West.<sup>63</sup> But how did we arrive here? To understand what Taylor is up to, and where this modesty comes from, we should take a step back to examine a key notion underlying his understanding of the postsecular: the eponymous idea of his influential essay "Two Theories of Modernity."

### ***The Two Modernities and the Question of "Progress"***

For Taylor, there have traditionally been two distinct ways of understanding the rise of modernity. The first "take" perceives the difference between present-day society and those that came before it as, essentially, a difference of *kind*. That is, the distinction is one between different "cultures" and, thus, the difference between medieval Europe and present-day America is analogous to the difference between medieval Europe and Tang Dynasty China. Taylor labels this paradigm, unsurprisingly, "cultural modernity." By contrast, the second "take" perceives a

difference in developmental *stage*. In this second view, the change from earlier ages to the “modern” arises from the ashes of “traditional” society. This kind of modernity is one that any society could undergo and that all *will* undergo—voluntarily or otherwise. This more common view he calls “acultural modernity.”

According to Taylor, the predominance of an acultural understanding of modernity carries with it certain dangers. It entails a “subtraction” story of modernity which assumes that values like “individualism, negative freedom, [and] instrumental rationality” have “come to the fore because they are what humans ‘normally’ value, once we are no longer impeded or blinded by false or superstitious beliefs and the stultifying modes of life that accompany them” (26). This view obscures the fact that Western modernity is a “novel form of moral self-understanding, not definable simply by the negation of what preceded it” (27, 26). This observation will be particularly important for a discussion about human rights that forms the conclusion of this chapter. For now, it is enough to recognize that an acultural view of modernity encourages an ethnocentric universalism regarding Western “values.”<sup>64</sup>

This understanding of modernity unfits us for what Taylor describes as “perhaps the most important task of social sciences in our day”: understanding the many “alternative modernities” extant worldwide (28). In essence, the acultural view assumes that in the end, everyone will “catch up to us.” As a result, we often believe that other non-Western cultures must also undergo the same *cultural* changes we have experienced. We thus remain blinkered both to the contingency of our own development toward modernity and to the fact that other cultures have played an active role in this development. At the same time, we fail to observe the different ways other cultures integrate the truly universal aspects of modernity, conditioned by their own understandings of identity which may differ significantly from ours.

For Taylor, therefore, many of the things we associate with modernity, including rationalization, methodological individualism, and a belief in “the omniscience of natural science” are not value-free, but are imbricated within a background of values that shape and determine their use and adoption. As one observer has pointed out, that the biologist Alfred Russel Wallace reached a conclusion almost identical to Darwin’s theory of natural selection at nearly the same moment “should make us ask how much it was a scientific discovery... and how much the expression of a metaphysical idea having much in common with *laissez-faire* economics, competition, progress, and the other ideas of the time” (Wilson 185). Even in the seemingly “rational” field of biology, human tendencies and historical contingencies influence and give rise to changes and “discoveries.” Thus, the concept of *laissez-faire* likely contributed to the widespread acceptance of a theory that has come to predominate in the biological sciences.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, in Taylor’s view, modernity does not merely represent the neutral decision of fully instrumental individuals to seek alternative sources of value and reasonable grounds for association with others in the wake of religious and metaphysical belief. Rather, the change should instead be seen as “moving us from one dense constellation of background understanding and imaginary to another, both of which place us in relation to others and good” (32-3).

We can even further develop this postsecular conception by adding Pecora’s own formulation of the trajectory of modernity. Pecora takes up (or, as he puts it, “creatively misuse[s]”) Vattimo’s notion of *Verwindung*, which the latter traces back through both Heidegger and Nietzsche, in opposition to the Hegelian *Aufhebung* (“negating-overcoming-preserving”) that describes “the implacable process through which...reason unfolds, ruses and all, in its pursuit of universal comprehension” (20, 22).<sup>66</sup> As such, rather than an inevitable, inexorable dialectical process which annihilates tradition, Pecora’s use of *Verwindung* represents

“the overcoming but also the distortion and reemergence of received religious concepts and patterns of thought” (23). Pecora’s conception thus complements Taylor’s trenchant distinction between “cultural” and “acultural” modernity. Both recognize that modernity did not inaugurate a clean break from a previous period of religious—or, at the very least, supernatural—belief, but that it represented, rather, a messy negotiation between religion and rationality that continues today.

### ***Verwindung, and the Poetry of “Loss”***

It is against this backdrop that we can begin to interpret Arnold’s work. The nuances of his work has escaped many critics, who see him as either hopelessly reactionary (Scott 262) or naïvely idealistic (Pratt 146). Indeed, Arnold’s iconic “Dover Beach” is often used as a representative example of the kind of “loss” experienced by the Victorians. Charles Taylor believes that the poem represents the archetypal “subtraction story” and, as such, represents “a quite inadequate account of modernity” (*A Secular Age* 572). Taylor’s view, ironically, follows older readings of the poem that see it as lamenting religion’s irrevocable loss. The famous movement which serves to illustrate Taylor’s point is as follows:

The Sea of Faith  
 Was once, too, at the full, and round earth’s shore  
 Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.  
 But now I only hear  
 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,  
 Retreating, to the breath  
 Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear  
 And naked shingles of the world. (ll. 21-28)

On the face of it, the passage does appear bleak about the prospects of religion in what has been called an Age of Science. The nostalgia conjured by the adverbial “once” compounds the effect of the elegiac adjectives “melancholy,” “long,” and “withdrawing.” This tone is further emphasized by the iambic stress on “once,” which is sustained by the single heavy stress on “too,” hammering home the strong parallelism between faith and the retreating sea.<sup>67</sup> These are contrasted with the fullness and strength summoned by the “bright girdle furled” and the leonine “roar.” But even in this contrast is something that troubles Taylor’s assessment of the poem. For the poem’s lyric speaker, the crashing waves and the ebb and flow of the tide suggest the fleeting nature of even the most obdurate of institutions. And yet, embedded in the narrative itself are hints and suggestions of permanence, even alongside such images of evanescent temporality: a particular kind of permanence—that of Pecora’s *Verwindung*.

Waves advance and retreat—the archetypal case of an incalculably diverse and temporal natural phenomena; the “night-wind” blows, never the same way twice, unpredictable and formless; the crash of the waves provides an aural experience unique and distinctive—never the same and yet always the same. The clamorous, (perhaps irritating?) “grating roar” of “pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling” is counterpoised against the sound’s constant repetition in a “tremulous cadence slow” (ll. 9-10, 13). The sound itself is described in perfect iambic pentameter (we hear the roar “Begin, and cease, and then again begin” ln. 12), seeming to imply a steady and constant rhythm. Yet the second metric foot (“and cease”), set off by insistent commas, acts as a break in the line, signaling the retreat of the wave, and encourages the insertion of a brief *pause*, a momentary *rubato*, that interrupts the otherwise plodding cadence. The phrasing not only beautifully captures the natural rhythm of the ocean breakers, but it also suggests a complex dance in which randomness (in the “flinging” of the pebbles—necessarily

haphazard) and unevenness (the “syncopated” rhythm of the waves) are balanced against the constancy and inexorably repetition of the waves.

Each constituent element is equal parts impermanent and unique, and yet the ritual of their action is played out night after night, century after century. Seen in this way, the waves represent not the elegiac intoning of religion’s demise, but rather, to borrow Pecora’s language, “the overcoming but also the distortion and reemergence of received religious concepts” in a process that is “constantly doubling back on itself.” As the lyric speaker suggests earlier in the movement, regarding the roar of the waves, “Sophocles long ago / Heard it on the Ægæan, and it brought / Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow / Of human misery” (ll. 15-18). This seems to suggest that this same chorus of crashing waves and blowing winds has been representative of the human condition (perpetual loss?) at least since the days of the ancient Greeks.

Nearly two millennia after Sophocles, it seems that not much has changed. This is exemplified in the lyric speaker’s description of the “grating roar” that brings “The eternal note of sadness in” (ll. 9, 14). As Kenneth Allott rightly suggests in his annotations, the waves “inevitably...remind man of time and change” (241). Nonetheless, that the “note of sadness” is an *eternal* one seems to suggest something more than simple alteration, from century to century; it implies a sense of constancy, an ever-present grappling with potential loss that places the changing nature of Victorian religion into a longer perspective of human struggle.<sup>68</sup> Like another monologue, Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey,” “Dover Beach” addresses a concrete other, inviting the interlocutor to “Come to the window” and to “Listen!” (ll. 6, 9). This seems to suggest that the struggle is best pursued collectively, rather than by the individual alone. Seen this way, the image of the sea actually complicates an interpretation of the poem that emphasizes the

magnitude of what has been lost. Recognizing loss and change as perpetual aspects of human experience should temper our reaction to it, rather than exacerbate it.

This is particularly important considering that the sea and tide *return*, with equal force, even as they withdraw time and time again. A. N. Wilson accuses Arnold of overlooking this fact, observes that “Tides turn. The sea comes back in. Arnold appears not to have noticed this rather simple bidiurnal fact” (264). Or, as I have been arguing, he not only noticed it, but turned it into a metaphor about the complex way that human knowledge changes and moves, all the while seeming to circle back to the same problems and issues. Change, certainly, but not subtraction. The poem thus questions the notion that the Victorian “loss” of religious orthodoxy is somehow more permanent than the ancient Greek one—a point also emphasized in Arnold’s “Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse.” Adding the notion of *Verwindung* helps us to see this poem as a touchstone for Arnold’s later prose. Read in this context, “Dover Beach” suggests that the nature of development is accretive and cyclical, rather than subtractive and linear: transformation without telos or inevitability.

Thus, religion changes, and even loses something—a sense of certainty, of taken-for-grantedness. At the same time, the constellation of goods embodied in orthodox religion continually re-emerges in altered but familiar forms. This is reflected in the final movement, in which the lyric speaker addresses his interlocutor: “for the world, which seems / To lie before us like a land of dreams, / So various, so beautiful, so new, / Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light / Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain” (ll. 30-34). Read in a literal register, the lines convey a bleak assessment of the Victorian landscape, one in which the new vistas of freedom offered by the retreat of traditional religion appear inviting and full of promise, even though these attractions are ultimately illusory. The new world, it seems, is bereft of all the certainty,

peace, love, and anodyne benefits that religion embodied; thus, its newness is a function of absence. Yet this final note seems to contradict the movement's opening: "Ah, love, let us be true / To one another!" (ll. 29-30). As Park Honan has put it, this love "is a precarious notion," one that "in the modern city, momentarily gives peace, but nothing else in a postmedieval society reflects or confirms the faithfulness of lovers" (235). Why, if the world "hath really neither joy, nor love," should the narrator call upon these very sentiments? Is peace without faithfulness recompense for the loss of certitude? Do love and hope remain—stubbornly, ineradicably—beyond all reason?

Arnold's "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" continues this line of questioning in many of the same ways as "Dover Beach," though in a different mode. Taking the ostensible form of a dramatic monologue, "Stanzas" recounts a visit to the monastery of the Carthusians, devout and famously ascetic. Nonetheless, as in "Dover Beach," we are invited to imagine the speaker as being both Arnold and not-Arnold, complicating his association with the ideas expressed. The musical, stanzaic nature of the work seduces us as readers to embrace the speaker's position, and yet, throughout are included moments of self-conscious frankness, which reveal a poet counterbalancing the imaginative story with a stance of philosophical objectivity. These tensions represent some of the most interesting aspects of the work, a poem which stands uneasily on the threshold between lyric and dramatic monologue. Throughout, "Stanzas" embraces this uncertainty, allowing the reader to struggle, along with the speaker, to characterize the emotions experienced through the narrative.

The work begins with the speaker seeking the Carthusians, the "last of the people who believe!" (l. 112), those who cling to the old ways of practicing religion. And yet, many of the same notes of uncertainty and doubt resound here. "Seized" in his youth by overzealous teachers,

the speaker asserts that his faith was “purged” and its fire “trimmed.” Despite this, he asks for their forgiveness, “at whose behest I long ago / So much unlearned, so much resigned,” for visiting these monks. In perhaps the most famous passage of the poem, he asserts that he visits them

Not as their friend, or child...  
 But as, on some far northern strand,  
 Thinking of his own Gods, a Greek  
 In pity and mournful awe might stand  
 Before some fallen Runic stone—  
 For both were faiths, and both are gone.

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,  
 The other powerless to be born,  
 With nowhere yet to rest my head,  
 Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.  
 Their faith, my tears, the world deride—  
 I come to shed them at their side. (ll. 79-90)

Thus the speaker seeks not wisdom but, perhaps, fellow-feeling, lamenting the loss of a faith which “is now / But a dead time’s exploded dream” (ll. 97-98). As noted above, Taylor takes these lines to represent a commonly held Victorian position that persists today. To use the words of another famous Arnoldian, Taylor points to “this sense of...self-legislated, yet nevertheless irrevocable abandonment” (Trilling 383). But the revised view from *Dover Beach* does not allow such simple sentiments. Even in his invocation of the Greeks here, and his seeming disappointment in being stranded “between two worlds,” there is a sense that, in Stefan Collini’s assessment, the speaker “takes a subtle, if perverse, pleasure in his stranded state, and would not,

now, exchange his lot for that of the credulous monk or the indifferent unbeliever” (41). As in “Dover Beach”, the uncertainty produces discomfort, to be sure, but brings with it a requisite excitement, a sense of expectation of what is to come, even, and perhaps especially, if this requires the invocation of human effort to replace the certainty that accompanies tradition.

In another passage that continues this line of thinking, the speaker asserts that

Years hence, perhaps, may dawn an age,

More fortunate, alas! Than we,

Which without hardness will be sage,

And gay without frivolity.

Sons of the world, oh, speed those years;

But, while we wait, allow our tears! (ll. 157-162)

Careful readers will note the specter of “belief” raising its head here, despite the seeming pessimism of the poem thus far. If the monks are truly the “last of the people who believe,” how does one account for the chord of hopefulness in the words “perhaps,” “dawn,” and “wait”? More than simply a trivial or trite turn of poetic phrase, this stanza captures a persistent—and by all accounts unfounded—inclination toward optimism that the future will bring with it new explanations and new succor. This refrain echoes earlier lines, as the narrator seems to decry the intellectual state of his peers: “The kings of modern thought are dumb; / Silent they are, though not content, / And wait to see the future come” (ll. 116-118). Where does such optimism come from? Why should the future bring anything more hopeful than the despair of the present? A clue comes in the striking similarities to “Dover Beach.” The “Sea of Faith” is here replaced by a “sea of time” (ln. 122); Byron and Shelley take Sophocles’ place as exemplars of their age; instead of “ignorant armies” there is a group of “passing troops in the sun’s beam” going “forth to the

world” (ll. 177, 179). The symbols in many ways echo the same sentiments; as a result, I suggest that we can read “Stanzas” as a further explication of the ideas broached in the earlier poem.

We have already seen how Arnold uses the sea as a complex symbol of both change and permanence. Here, too, the metaphor does similar work. The speaker describes how “Our fathers watered with their tears / This sea of time whereon we sail” even as these tears seemed to have been in vain: “The sufferers died, they left their pain – / The pangs which tortured them remain” (ll. 121-122, 131-132). In “Dover Beach,” the sea represents something that seems impermanent but is actually surprisingly constant—the “Faith” that appeared to be waning could be seen as waxing again, in the reliable ebb and flow of time. Here, too, the sea stands for the passage of history which seems to be a product of circumstance and accident, changeable and unpredictable. And yet the speaker muses: “Still the same ocean round us raves / But we stand mute, and watch the waves” (ll. 125-126). In one sense, the narrative seems to suggest that in the monastery, as with religion, time is suspended, refusing to follow the narrative of progress. Outside of the walls, however, the sea churns and roils; it is constant in its moving, in its passing, and in its bringing of calamity and “perpetual loss.”

Even in pointing to the seeming permanence of suffering and the uselessness of men’s lamenting it, however, the speaker seems to undermine his complaint that his own struggle with belief is somehow more final than that of his forbears, going back to the ancient Greeks. His argument about the impotence of the ameliorating work of Byron and Shelley to address loss self-destructs under the weight of the reference to the iconic Romantic poets. How self-indulgent, indeed, to opine that the work of these poets was anodyne enough for previous generations, but ineffective now!<sup>69</sup> How childish to look (naively) forward to a coming time of sagacity, but in the meantime to exclaim “while we wait, allow our tears!”—the very tears that

were supposedly so useless in effecting change when wept by “our fathers.” Most critically, Arnold compares the “kings of modern thought” remaining silent “though not content” in the face of the Victorian “loss of faith,” to Achilles “ponder[ing] in his tent” (ll. 116, 117, 115). The association is an apt one for this reading.<sup>70</sup> We are reminded of proud Achilles, petulantly sulking in his tent—not innocently “pondering”—refusing to fight on behalf of the Greeks, having suffered the humiliating loss of Briseis to Agamemnon.

That the narrator reads Achilles’s hubris as contemplation is telling; rather than a deliberate reluctance to participate in the Trojan War out of a bruised ego, the narrator interprets Achilles’s reticence as thoughtfulness, rather than indulgent self-pitying. This strategic reading creates emotional distance from the speaker’s own feelings, complicating our reading of the narrative as an earnest lament. As readers, we know better than to see Achilles’s withdrawal as a praiseworthy act, and indeed it takes the death of Patroclus—who, significantly, is killed acting in Achilles’s place—to rouse him to action. Thus the speaker allows himself to read as sage inaction what has become *the* cautionary tale on the cost of inaction and pride. By poking (gentle) fun at the speaker’s earnestness, the narrative underscores its profound ambivalence. Even as it invites us to identify with the speaker’s own struggle, it strives to maintain a sense of the true complexity of the feelings involved, counterbalancing sympathy and distance in equal measure. The result is a space in which the questions of faith and loss are neither trivialized nor merely intellectualized, as Arnold cannily employs these dramatic techniques to devastating effect.

The speaker’s apparent myopia is only further reinforced in the closing six stanzas with his coda on the “passing troops” marching “Forth to the world... / To life, to cities, and to war!” (ll. 179-180). At first glance, these soldiers, marked by “Pennon, and plume, and flashing lance!”

appear full of purpose, resolve, and vivacity. In the narrator's view, they beckon to "we" who are "like children reared in shade / Beneath some old-world abbey wall" to take up arms and pursue "Action and pleasure" (ll. 171-2, 178, 194). However, not unlike the "confused armies" of "Dover Beach," the apparently world-weary narrator depicts the soldiers as being unaware that their calls to war are wasted:

How should we grow in other ground?

How can we flower in foreign air?

-- Pass, banners, pass, and bugles, cease;

And leave our desert to its peace! (ll. 207-210)<sup>71</sup>

Read alongside the mid-poem reference to Achilles and the value of apparent "inaction," the speaker's response reflects the disheartened fatigue that characterizes the poem taken at face value. Nostalgic for a time when belief and action were still possible, his reaction to the trooping soldiers seems to represent a classic Victorian loss of faith narrative. Nonetheless, taking into account the speaker's (dramatically blinkered) view of his cultural moment, we can also read this section as a send up of Victorian equivocation on matters of religious faith. As one can see in his later prose, Arnold was impatient both with the inaction that seemed to plague many nineteenth century thinkers, those "kings of modern thought," and with those who seemed to cling to orthodoxy (and pedantically literal readings of Biblical texts) for no other reasons than tradition. Here, Arnold gently mocks the hand-wringing aspects of commentary on the changing landscape of Victorian religion while also subversively questioning the wisdom in pining for a view of religion that has passed the Victorians by. By having the dialogue spoken by a tourist, Arnold creates a sense of distance from his position, even as we are invited to sympathize with his position.

Of course, the standard readings of both “Dover Beach” and “Stanzas” read the speaker as being Arnold, with the biographical record (and, indeed, Allott himself) seeming to concur. However, there is significant evidence to suggest that Arnold consciously distances himself from his speaker, even as he identifies with him. For example, the overdone attention to bucolic detail in the opening stanza (“Through Alpine meadows soft-suffused / With rain, where thick the crocus blows” ll. 1-2) combined with the clumsy metaphors of an urban dweller (“What pointed roofs are these advance? / A palace of the Kings of France?” ll.23-24) promise melodrama and excess rather than the pointed critique the poet has come to be best known for. Add to this the too-rapid shift from alienation at the outset (“I behold / The House, the Brotherhood austere! / -- And what am I, that I am here?” ll. 64-66) to full association by the conclusion (“And leave our desert to its peace!” l. 210), present the makings of a satirical take on spectatorship, armchair philosophers, and modern anxieties about religion and its “loss.” Perhaps the better reading, therefore, is to see the work as an experiment, of sorts, in which Arnold seeks to fully understand and represent the position of his speaker, even as he offers to his readers both the verisimilitude of Victorian doubt while questioning its contours.

We can see from these poems that Arnold was hardly naïve about the changing perceptions of religion in the mid-nineteenth century. It is also clear that he realized the stakes it still held for his audience, a society in which, as Collini puts it, “a new work of Biblical exegesis could be a best-seller, and where volumes of sermons and theological tracts far outsold novels and other genres” (93). Therefore, his work carefully avoids disparaging the earnestness of belief itself and its practice, even as he questions some of its most deeply-held convictions. Read in relation with the larger body of his work, and particularly in symphony with his later prose,

Arnold clearly takes the religious faith of his audience seriously, even as he recognizes that one of the greatest challenges to such a faith is its relationship with science.

In poems like “In Harmony with Nature” and “Religious Isolation” we can see Arnold working in a different mode yet, in order to explore this relationship. As Allott points out, the original published title of 1849 for the first of these two poems was “To an Independent Preacher, who preached that we should be ‘In Harmony with Nature’” (54). The later change in 1877 to the shorter version, after the 1873 publication of *Literature and Dogma* and its attendant backlash, is telling. By the time of the poem’s reprinting, Arnold’s opinions on Nonconformity’s antagonistic relationship to the Church of England were well known, having been addressed directly in *St. Paul and Protestantism* (1870). Arnold, seeing the Establishment as productive not only of common feeling and the encouragement of morality, felt that Dissent was Philistine occupation, one not compatible with the supple nuances of social interaction and Biblical interpretation that culture and literature cultivated.

At the same time, he was aware that his tendency toward satire and the polemical could be off putting. One example was the virulent outcry arising from his critical parody in *Literature and Dogma* of the three persons of the trinity to three “infinitely magnified and improved Lord Shaftesbury[s]” to make a point about dogma. There, Arnold creates a fairy-tale with three Lord Shaftesburys each representing a different person of the trinity, acting in ways similar to their supernatural counterparts. Anthropomorphized, the various actions of the trinity seem nonsensical, at best. In reaction, as Clinton Machann notes, the *London Quarterly Review* voiced an opinion widely-shared that the metaphor represented “‘the foulest opprobrium’ in modern theological literature” (118). In response, Arnold not only clarified his argument at length in his preface to the 1883 popular edition of the book, but he removed the offending comparison

altogether. The incident shows how seriously Arnold took his responsibilities as a critic on religion, as well as his commitment to the continuing need for religion, though one attuned to the changing cultural and intellectual landscape.

That Arnold retained “In Harmony” then, altered title notwithstanding, suggests how significant he felt the main issue explored in the sonnet to be. “In Harmony” examines the eponymous dictum, preached by a “restless fool,” challenging it as unexamined and facile. The speaker begins by attacking the statement as unintentionally ironic, considering the “heat” and passion with which it was made, compared to the relative “coolness” and dispassionate workings of Nature. In the form of an invective as much as anything else, the poem argues that “man hath all which Nature hath, but more / And in that *more* lie all his hopes of good” (ll. 5-6). In making this point, the speaker points to the apparent differences between the two, including Nature’s necessary and instinctual cruelty compared with man’s relative weariness with war, Nature’s lack of emotion versus the human tendency to seek objects of adoration, and Nature’s remorselessness versus man’s conscience. While we will return to these binaries momentarily, the speaker goes on to conclude that “Man must begin, know this, where Nature ends; / Nature and man can never be fast friends” (ll. 12-13). Compare this with poems like “Quiet Work” and “Morality” in which we see the speaker admiring Nature and looking to it for guidance. The former poem implores “One lesson, Nature, let me learn of thee,” seeking to emulate the “silent” way Nature goes about its work, in comparison to the “fitful uproar mingling with his toil” that characterizes man (ll. 1, 10). Similarly, in “Morality,” the narrator impersonates Nature, who intones, ““There is no effort on *my* brow— / I do not strive, I do not weep; / I rush with the swift spheres and glow / In joy, and when I will, I sleep”” (ll. 25-28). How to resolve this apparent conundrum? The narrators of Arnold’s poetry seem to want things both ways, to criticize the

Independent Preacher looking to emulate Nature, and at the same time to admire the cool detachment with which it unthinkingly acts.

Thais Morgan argues that Arnold's nature sonnets "close with a fundamentally humanistic message and do not reject traditional beliefs so much as call for a reordering of priorities away from God and Nature toward Man" (430). This view is shared by Sylvia Bailey Shurbutt who suggests that Arnold's poetry points toward a "profound humanism" and that "it is with man himself that the poetry is ultimately concerned" (104). While it's hard to disagree with the sentiments expressed here, I think Arnold is doing much more in his poems, especially when read in light of his later writing. He is, of course, skeptical that the guide to human flourishing lies in nature, but he's also less sanguine about man's potential and his inherent goodness than Morgan and Shurbutt make him out to be.

It is significant, therefore, that Arnold consistently retains Nature's personified capitalization in his poetry. Nature is thus placed in the position of other-than-man in a move that is both familiar and vexed. Readers would certainly have been familiar with the trope of Nature as the object of Romantic paeans and a Wordsworthian counterbalance to man's avarice and promethean industrial ambitions. And yet, in using such a mode of address, the poem actually raises Nature to the position of personhood, performing a double work: Nature is both "us and not us"—something against which we posit ourselves, even as it can only do such work as our opposite and equal. How else to explain lines from "In Harmony" like "man hath all which Nature hath, but more" and "Man must begin, know this, where Nature ends"? For Arnold, the positioning of Nature as "other" carries with it significant implications—some liberatory, others less so. On one hand, man's relationship with Nature is generative and procreative, as

characterized by Darwin and other Victorian biologists. At the same time, Nature is the servant and provenance of man, to be distanced from, essentialized and mastered.<sup>72</sup>

While the poetry does not adjudicate between these two possibilities, it sounds a clear note about the implications of looking too closely into the book of Nature as a guide for human action, whether the examiners be Romantic poets or Victorian scientists. As if to concretize the difference, the speaker of “Religious Isolation” intones, “To its own impulse every creature stirs; / Live by thy light, and earth will live by hers!” (ll. 13-14). And yet, careful reflection on the binary distinctions between man and Nature highlighted in “In Harmony” produces the realization that history undermines them in many ways. Appearing in 1849, the poem was written before the Crimean War—considered the first technologically “modern” conflict—by a mere four years. Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, which preceded the poem, introduced the notion of capitalist alienation that made “labour” generally—and money more specifically—the true object of human worship and sustenance. The same text suggested that capitalism had institutionalized the remorselessness of the “haves” toward the “have-nots” in a way that rendered conscience practically immaterial in the face of “rational” market forces.

In light of these Victorian (and indeed, modern) realities, one is tempted to understate the distinction between man and his “unfeeling” environment, “red in tooth and claw.” In fact, when left to our own devices, we seem to have a clear tendency to revert to our baser instincts—instincts that nineteenth-century science suggested were a product of eons of natural forces that had conspired to produce creatures that longed for peace and generosity but much more easily reacted with violence and avarice. However, reading the Nature poems in concert with those more overtly about religious belief like “Dover Beach” and “Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse” can help us to better understand Arnold’s work. Throughout his career, Arnold

maintained a distinct modesty toward the Victorian science that seemed to suggest the animal nature of human tendencies, though he valued the work of literature to mitigate these tendencies. What's more, as his later writings demonstrate, Arnold was keen to apply what he understood to be the important achievements of science to the study not only of literature, but to the Bible in particular. Arnold thus represented the middle ground in the Victorian debates between science and religion, even as he was cast in the role of literature's defender in his Rede Lecture of 1882, written as a response to Huxley's 1880 essay "Science and Culture" which sought to ban the humanities from a newly founded Birmingham science school.<sup>73</sup> Yet, how did there come to be such a debate between science and religion? Why does it rage on today? What, precisely, was the Victorian opinion on this debate, such as it was? These questions are critical if we are to understand not only the context in which Arnold was writing, but also if we are to make sense of his later writings on religion, dismissed by one critic as "tending toward a kind of mysticism"—a charge I hope to show as both misguided and surprisingly insightful.<sup>74</sup>

***Interlude: Science and the Literary Critic***

[T]he more that the results of science are frankly accepted, the more that poetry and eloquence come to be received and studied as what in truth they really are,—the criticism of life by gifted men, alive and active with extraordinary power.

- "Literature and Science," 1883

In framing his discussion of nineteenth-century attitudes toward science and religion, D. H. Meyer describes the late Victorians as being "perhaps the last generation among English-speaking intellectuals able to believe that man was capable of understanding his universe, just as they were the first generation collectively to suspect that he never would" (591). Compare this

sense of angst with recent statements like that of Oxford chemist Peter Atkins, whose book *On Being* (2011) opens with the following bold statement:

The scientific method can shed light on every and any concept, even those that have troubled humans since the earliest stirrings of consciousness and continue to do so still today. It can elucidate love, hope, and charity. It can elucidate those great inspirations to human achievement, the seven deadly sins of pride, envy, anger, greed, sloth, gluttony, and lust. (vii)

Or, consider the position of Richard Dawkins, evolutionary biologist, inventor of the concept of the “meme,” and famous for his description of the “selfish gene.” Dawkins, former Oxford Professor for Public Understanding of Science and an outspoken atheist, concedes, with uncharacteristic reserve, that “[p]erhaps there are some genuinely profound and meaningful questions that are forever beyond the reach of science. Maybe quantum theory is already knocking on the door of the unfathomable. But if science cannot answer some ultimate question, what makes anybody think that religion can?” (80). Both Dawkins and Atkins demonstrate here their fervent belief that science will answer any and all questions that can be answered.

Contrast these accounts with Stephen Jay Gould’s discussion of science and religion as representing “non-overlapping magisteria” (or, NOMA). In a 1997 essay in *Natural History*, Gould suggests that each comprises a legitimate, non-overlapping domain of teaching authority (274). So, as Gould would have it, such a *modus vivendi* would allow both scientists and religionists to continue prosecuting their respective disciplines, each agnostic, as it were, to the claims of authority of the other. Deeply skeptical of this notion, Dawkins is quick to suggest that this boundary is not only a permeable one (a notion that Gould himself concedes), but that it would be immediately abandoned under certain conditions. As he puts it, “[t]he moment there was the smallest suggestion of any evidence in favour of religious belief, religious apologists would lose no time in throwing NOMA out of the window” (83).

One thing remains clear in this debate: the connection between science and modernity in particular remains a strong one in the minds of many. As Pecora puts it, “the practical link between modernization and secularization remains alive and well...the role of “science” as an antidote to “superstition” remains a significant part of what major Western institutions—from the academies to the courts of law—consider the social good” (*Secularization* 17). For Pecora, the answer is not a return to any particular religious code, nor recourse to “a purely formal and arbitrary sense of ‘legality,’ in which we simply abandon the idea that political norms should not be divorced from a search for universally acceptable moral truths.” Instead, the need to accurately account for the relationship between religion and modernity becomes more salient.

John Gray extends Pecora’s observations further to argue that while myths are not falsifiable in the same way that scientific theories are, but that they nonetheless “can be more or less truthful in reflecting the enduring realities of human life” (*Black Mass* 206). He goes on to contrast this understanding with that which has come to dominate current thinking about the scientific: an understanding that he finds lacking.

In secular thought science has come to be viewed as a vehicle of revelation, a repository of truth rather than a system of symbols that serves the human need to understand and control. Post-modern philosophies that view science as just one belief-system among many are too silly to be worth refuting at length—the utility of scientific knowledge is a brute fact that is shown in the increase of human power. Science is an instrument for forming reliable beliefs about the world. Religions are also human instruments, but they have other goals. The ideal goal of scientific inquiry may be an end-point at which human beliefs mirror the world in an all-embracing theory, and in science this ideal may be useful (even if it is also illusive). But why should religions aim for consensus? While true beliefs may be useful in our everyday dealings, doubts are more to the

point in the life of the spirit. Religions are not claims to knowledge but ways of living with what cannot be known. (*Black Mass* 207)

Gray acknowledges the undeniable role of science in explaining natural phenomena, even as he sees religion as a way of managing the unknowable, and guiding conduct. As Christopher Lane suggests, “Victorian literature and science affected each other, including through their shared use of doubt” (3). Doubt was as much a part of Victorian science as it was of Victorian religion, and Lane argues for the importance of “upholding philosophical and religious uncertainty as an ethical position,” in hopes to bring “historical depth and perspective to today’s contradictions, to let the Victorians pose questions to believers and nonbelievers that they might prefer to leave unasked” (12). And yet, where do Arnold’s critics stand with respect to the question?

George Levine argues that for Arnold, “[s]cience produces knowledge that...brings light without sweetness. The idea with firm outlines, expressed in language ‘rigid, fixed, and scientific’... has no relation to our distinctively human needs” (“Arnold’s Science of Religion” 147). Fred Dudley, in one of the first essays to deal directly with the connection between Arnold and science, sees the matter quite differently, arguing that “[i]n spite of a certain distrust of or distaste for science and a fairly comprehensive ignorance of its details, he believed he was following in important ways the lead of the scientific spirit” (276). Which of these accounts is correct? The truth lies probably somewhere between the two.

As we can see in his later prose, Arnold is keen to address the topic in ways that do not denigrate science, or reduce its contributions. In what follows, I see Arnold as proposing, in *Literature and Dogma*, a form of Christianity acceptable to scientists. Or, at the very least, one that would not be objectionable to them. Even in doing so, Arnold provocatively argues, “the Bible must not be taken as a set of scientific propositions, or ‘as a sort of talisman given down to us out of Heaven, with all its part equipollent’—which became the Jewish view and is now the

unhistorical, uncritical fundamentalist view” (Bush 178). This is the tightrope that Arnold walks, and one that holds key applications for our discussion of public morality today, including current debates on so-called “human rights.”

### **Literature and Dogma and the Question of Conduct**

As R. H. Super reminds us, *Literature and Dogma* was “the only one of [Arnold’s] prose works, apart from his reports on Continental education, that was written as a book rather than as a series of lectures or articles” (81). Indeed, its argument was presented completely and without interruption. Stefan Collini emphasizes that the book was both popular and controversial: while it sold more copies than any of his writings in his lifetime, many cancelled their subscriptions to the *Cornhill* in which it was serialized and, like Ruskin’s work in the same, it too was cancelled due to fears of offending (94).

In her influential *Arnold and God* (1983), Ruth ApRoberts mentions that “secularists” have sometimes felt “nervous” about Arnold’s works on religion and the Bible, worried over a potentially “indecent supernaturalism,” while “supernaturalists have been nervous about the secular approach and rationalism” (vii). This seems to be compounded by a concern that he is being too “subjective” or tending toward the overly “meta-physical,” when, indeed, his whole point is to avoid being subjective or metaphysical at all.<sup>75</sup> Building on his ideas in *St. Paul and Protestantism* (1870), *Literature and Dogma* supposes that the supernatural is out. However, something remains with the rationalization of religion that is common to humanity and something above humanity, informing its moral codes: a constellation of goods embedded in the concept of “conduct.” This perspective leaves out a personal God and an incarnated Christ, but does so strategically. In fact, Arnold’s concerns are the concerns of today, as he seeks to answer

the following questions: What advantages does religion offer to people who do not subscribe to its tenets? Is religion still of value in helping us to determine right action?

Throughout, Arnold makes a provocative case for a kind of modern religion that is informed and driven by reason and not simply “revelation”—a religion predicated on a type of science, though not the laboratory kind. In his original introduction to the book, he is quick to acknowledge that the religion that “has always hitherto been a great power in England” must now be seen in the position of third place in terms of influence, after “the friends of physical science...and the aristocracy” (6:165).<sup>76</sup> Having conceded this point, however, he emphasizes that the religious leaders of his day still retain the public eye; leaders, ironically, who are following the lead of the “physical sciences” into a kind of “hard, abstruse reasoning” that seeks to deduce dogma from abstract concepts like “the eternal” (6:168). This Arnold calls “theological science,” and he argues that both have aligned themselves against “letters” (6:166). That is, theologians do not appreciate a literary approach to religious history, seeing it as subversive, even as scientists do not accept literature, since it does not meet their standards of objective proof.<sup>77</sup> For Arnold, however, “To understand that the language of the Bible is fluid, passing, and literary, not rigid, fixed, and scientific, is the first step toward a right understanding of the Bible” (6:152).

What he aims at, then, is to try to apply a literary reading to the Bible, in order to generalize its conclusions for a wider (read: non-religious) audience, even while attempting to recuperate it for a Christian audience that has ceased to believe in the supernatural. He does this by eschewing the more “scientific” definitions of God that rely on a great deal of systematic theology and speculation, and seeking to ground his explanation in something that he feels can be verified by “all men at all times”: experience. Specifically, the experience of the “happiness”

that comes from following the dictates of “conduct” which, he consistently argues, “is nearly the whole of human life” (6.373), or, as he mentions throughout, “three-fourths” of it.

First, imagine we accept Arnold’s definition that conduct is, in fact, “nearly the whole of human life.” For Arnold, this means that in the history of humankind, the most important operation assumption of society has been that the majority of life is concerned with how to conduct oneself on a daily basis. As he defines it, “Eating, drinking, ease, pleasure, money, the intercourse of the sexes, the giving free swing to one’s temper and instincts,—these are the matters with which conduct is concerned, and with which all mankind know and feel it to be concerned” (6:173). Here, he clearly doesn’t refer to “vocation” or even “manners,” though these are not immaterial to his argument. Rather, he means in essence an ethics or morality that governs human action in community (though, Arnold would argue, the imperatives apply even to the individual in isolation). This is a critical point, and one that undergirds his wider argument beyond the limited realms of a particular religion or irreligion, or even of culture or time. For indeed, no matter the culture or period, humans *have* had an idea of “right” conduct, or, even more fundamentally, the idea of right and wrong. As in Taylor’s understanding of background, Arnold’s “conduct” is “a product of social understanding formed by modes of ritual and influences below the level of active, conscious inculcation.” Thus, for Arnold, the notions are embedded so deeply that we experience them on an affective level, which is expressed as happiness when followed and guilt when not.

Note that Arnold *is not* concerned with establishing an idea of a universal morality or code of conduct that applied to all people at all times. Rather, he merely posits the notion that all societies and people have the *idea* of conduct, and indeed conform to it to varying degrees. While it’s true enough that he favors the particular Judeo-Christian code, and Christianity as “the

most effective means” of conduct, at least in an English context, he certainly refers to a wide range of sources, both modern and ancient, in establishing his claims for the importance of conduct to society. He cites the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Protagoras who “bears his testimony to the scope and nature of *conduct*” in describing a child’s inculcation from youth, trained by nurse, mother, teacher, and father who make every effort in “teaching and showing him, as to everything he has to do or say, how this is right and that not right, and this is honourable and that vile, and this holy and that unholy, and this do and that do not” (6:174). In the same section, he cites the French philosopher Émile Maximilien Paul Littré<sup>78</sup> who theorized that all of our impulses could be classed into two elementary instincts: “the instinct of self-preservation and the reproductive instinct.” Ambivalent though the champion of culture is about such a theory, Arnold nonetheless notes that how we deal with these impulses is very much the business of conduct: “how we obey, regulate, or restrain them; that, and nothing else” (6:174).

Arnold’s point in drawing from such diverse sources is to establish that conduct is indeed a fundamental aspect of human functioning. Even more specifically, he means the notion of a conscience, expressed collectively as written codes since at least the time of Hammurabi, that restrain the baser elements of human desire (we can imagine that Arnold likely means the desires for unchecked self-interest). That is, societies have always had rules, and societies have always had rule-breakers. Here, Arnold is suggesting that there are things in the human composition that resist the checks to self-interest, but that this thing—conscience—is at various times stronger or weaker, both personally and even societally. His ultimate goal is to argue for the usefulness of religion—that thing whose object is the correct apprehension of conduct. More specifically, Arnold clarifies, “Conduct is the word of common life, morality is the word of philosophical disquisition, righteousness is the word of religion.” By “righteousness,” Arnold means, in one of

his most famous definitions, “*morality touched by emotion*” (6:176). To illustrate this, he turns to a quote from Socrates’s *Oedipus Rex*: “Oh that my lot might lead me in the path of holy innocence of thought and deed, the path with august laws ordain, laws which in the highest heaven had their birth, neither did the race of mortal men beget them, nor shall oblivion ever put them to sleep; the power of God is mighty in them, and growth not old” (6:178). This, Arnold argues, is not only as religious as the Biblical passages he has just quoted, but like such passages, evidences “not the mere enjoining of conduct, but it is this enjoining touched, strengthened, and almost transformed, by the addition of feeling” (6:178). Specifically, the speaker of this passage demonstrates not only the proclivity toward right conduct, but a dedication such that it imagines morality that transcends the particularities of time and place, proceeding from a source outside human invention. For Arnold the point is not, importantly, that these laws actually be universal, or even universally applied. Rather, what Socrates demonstrates is a passion for right conduct that inspires humans beyond their normal capacity.

Here enters Arnold’s conception of race, as he argues that certain “races” (which, as Frederic Faverty points out, Arnold consistently and carelessly has conflated with the idea of “nation” (10-11)) have had a stronger notion of not only how to pursue this adherence to conduct, but also desired it more strongly than most.<sup>79</sup> For Arnold, “Israel” and by extension, the Bible, have “a specialty for righteousness, for making us feel what it is and giving us an enthusiasm for it” (6:370-71). For proof of this, Arnold turns to no less than “experience”; he enjoins his readers who doubt this to simply “*try it!*” By this he means to simply “take a course of the Bible first, and then a course of Benjamin Franklin, Horace Greeley, Jeremy Bentham, and Mr. Herbert Spencer; see which has most effect, which satisfies you most, which gives you most moral force” (6:371). While this hardly seems scientifically precise in the way we now come to

expect, Arnold's argument does have the advantage here of being based in something "testable," and as such subject to experiment and falsification, subjective though it may be. The point is therefore less about Arnold's questionable racial theories, and more about his attempt to give to the discussion on religion a basis on which it could be empirically examined. Of course, something Arnold never considers is the possibility that the Bible might not, in fact, be the most convincing document or method for producing right conduct. However, we can appreciate his attempt to give concrete—and therefore a more widely applicable—grounding to what was traditionally understood as a metaphysical and supernatural document. Indeed, one need not embrace the supernatural aspects of the book at all in order to appreciate it as a textbook for the Arnoldian definition of righteousness.

"Salvation," then, for Arnold, is *not* the means by which an eternal soul is saved, as both the means and the soul itself would fall under the classification of "unverifiable" things. Rather, when he argues that "righteousness has been our salvation," he means salvation as representing the result to happiness which results when people can find the most effective means of individually and collectively adhering to conduct. And yet, external actions alone are no purchase or guarantee of righteousness. For Arnold, only the secret (*necrosis*) and the method (*epieikeia*, or "sweet reasonableness") to right conduct can actually be understood as attaining the morality touched by emotion. To understand this better, we must know what *necrosis* and *epieikeia* entail, and how Jesus plays a key role in the process of apprehending righteousness.

### ***The Method and the Secret***

In Arnold's view, Jesus pursued righteousness better than any other figure in history. This is what makes him uniquely a "son" of the Eternal that makes for righteousness; that is, making

him “one with the Father”; of the same kind or type. First, it is very important for Arnold that the Biblical notion of “the Eternal” be defined precisely and correctly, in order to render a “scientific account of God” and “Israel’s authentic intuition of him” (6:373). Quoting Psalm 90 (“Eternal, thou has been our refuge from one generation to another”), Arnold argues that the notion of the Eternal as “a Great Personal First Cause, who thinks and loves” is not something that can be verified as having been a comfort to men. At first glance, this does, admittedly, seem to be Arnold at his most willfully subversive. His Victorian readers would certainly have had the notion of a Personal God firmly embedded in their collective consciousness, the “cloud by day and pillar of fire by night” of the Exodus account, and the God who handed down the Ten Commandments to Moses. And yet, Arnold suggests, there is no way to empirically verify that the concept of a *personal* God has driven right conduct “in all the history of man” (6:373). His aim is therefore to expand the passage from being about Israel’s experience per se to representing humanity at large. Thus, for Arnold, the Eternal is not a personal, “uncaused first cause,” but rather his famous, oft-repeated, and controversial construction: the “enduring Power that makes for righteousness” (6:375). This definition was savaged by the philosopher F. H. Bradley, Arnold’s contemporary, who saw it as tautological. While there is some truth to the assertion, R. L. Brett argues that the point for Arnold is that religion “carries with it a feeling of awe associated with the moral law,” and as such provides a support for right conduct (82).

Why does this matter for Arnold? Remember that his goal is to present a scientific religion accessible to all. Clearly, the concept of an all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present deity is not something that can be verified empirically. Therefore, Jesus as being the “Son of a Great Personal First Cause” is also unverifiable. What, then to make of Scripture? Arnold proposes that we think of God as the motive force behind the inclination toward right conduct. This is an

understanding of God that requires no metaphysics, even while it has the benefit of explaining and unifying the many world religions under one banner.

What makes Christianity special among religions and beliefs, then, is the character of Jesus: “the son of God because he gives the method and secret by which alone is righteousness possible” (6:375). In distancing his understanding of Jesus from the supernatural, Arnold recognizes that a degree of *Aberglaube*, or “extra belief,” has surrounded the Biblical accounts, including miracles, the virgin birth, etc. He even concedes that Jesus himself was “immersed in the *Aberglaube* of his nation and time” and that we simply must “make deduction for his *Aberglaube*, and to admire him for the insight he displayed in spite of it” (6:378). Nevertheless, Arnold argues for the primacy of Jesus over all other religions. In a moment of surprising open-mindedness, the poet compares “the all-importance of *righteousness*, the *method* of Jesus, the *secret* of Jesus” with the major world religions of his day, conceding much of their benefit. For Arnold, “Mahometanism” makes righteousness all important, but it lacks the method and secret of Jesus; “Brahminism,” again, emphasizes the importance of righteousness, but is all too metaphysical; and Buddhism, “a religion to be saluted with respect,” has both the sense of righteousness and even the secret of Jesus, but is wanting in the *epieikeia*—a “sweet-reasonableness” that requires a flexibility that comes with pursuing righteousness—that characterizes Christianity (6:382). Thus, even though the Christian missions were inadequate in their Bible criticism, the secret and method of Jesus they brought did some good.<sup>80</sup>

How Jesus accomplishes this is what fascinates Arnold and, he argues, has fascinated Christians for centuries. There are two main impulses at work here. First, for Arnold, conduct followed produces happiness, but righteousness without sweetness or without a willingness to correct action taints and diminishes this happiness. Arnold’s deeper point is that conduct, indeed,

leads to a happy outcome, but only if followed out of a voluntary and indeed a joyful disposition. This he sees as the need of Israel rectified by Jesus. Israel loved the law, and Israel worshiped the law, but Israel had lost sight of the need to love obeying the law, not only externally but internally. Thus, in Arnold's view, to attain true happiness, on an affective level, righteousness must be both external in the act and internal in the desire.

But how to cultivate the desire? By understanding the secret of Jesus: *necrosis*, a dying to self, an encouraging and developing a disinterestedness toward right conduct that can lead to a lasting happiness. The beauty of this, for Arnold, is that the version of Jesus' *necrosis*, in contrast to that of the medieval fathers, had no castigating self-violence, wrenching denial, or painful reinforcement. Rather, Jesus demonstrated the simple beauty of a life lived for others and not for self—the essence of righteousness, of right conduct touched by emotion. Only in this way can righteousness be had truly, both internally and externally. Doing good in and of itself does not produce happiness; only the realization that self-interestedness will not ultimately lead to fulfillment can produce the peace that necrosis offers. Hence, Arnold's praise of Buddhism's having discovered this secret: rejecting the notion that the self is paramount.<sup>81</sup> Thus, when Christianity makes the specific claim that "righteousness comes by Christ alone," Arnold does not understand this in some metaphysical sense of a supernatural transformation that is attained by a mental acknowledgement of God as a personal first cause and Christ as his son. Rather, Arnold argues that Jesus, the man, found out the secret of righteousness and shared it with his disciples; and, by following this secret, we too can be "saved," can attain the happiness that comes from righteousness.

The beauty of this method, for Arnold, is that it is verifiable. That is, he welcomes his reader to attempt to pursue this kind of righteousness by any other means than the secret of Jesus,

by any other internal or external means. However, as he warns, to follow Jesus's example, that is "to attend to this experience about the Bible, needs more steadiness than to attend to the momentary impressions of hunger, fatigue, and pain; therefore it is called *faith*, and counted a virtue" (6.375). "Faith," because the end must be trusted before experienced. This is no contradiction of verifiability for Arnold; indeed, it is a result that can be verified by experience; the faith only comes once the difficulty of the *necrosis*, the "dying to the self" becomes evident and quitting seems the appealing option. This verifiability, Arnold argues, represents "a much firmer, nay an impregnable, ground for the Bible [as compared with theology, reasoning from first principles, reliance on miracles and the supernatural, etc.], and for recommending it to the world, if we put the construction on it we propose" (6.375).

At the same time, Jesus combined this selflessness with a particular method: *epieikeia*.<sup>82</sup> In her analysis of the ideas of equity and mercy, Martha Nussbaum draws on an example from Herodotus's *History* to explain how *epieikeia* contrasts with "the notion of strict retributive justice," or *dikê*, and can be associated instead with a sense of "situational appropriateness" (6). This trait can be seen in Jesus "bending" the law in breaking Sabbath injunctions against healing (Mk. 3), in not ceremoniously washing before eating (Lk. 11), in his disciples not fasting when "necessary" (Mk. 2), among many others. For Arnold, this trait of seeking the intention rather than the mere letter of the law was the opposite of Puritanical dogmatism. Balanced against the stoic virtue of *necrosis*, as he puts it in his *Last Essays on Church and Religion* (1877), the gentleness and meekness of *epieikeia* "puts [righteousness and Christianity] in such a way before a man that he feels disposed and eager to lay hold of it...and thus his practice gets changed" (8:28). Again, Arnold appeals to his readers' experience, to judge whether a sense of justice wouldn't be more attractive with this sweetness added.

More importantly, *epieikeia* was at the heart of Arnold's idea of "eternal life." As the Gospel of John puts it, eternal life is "to know...the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (17:3). Excluding supernatural interpretations, this meant knowing the enduring power that makes for righteousness, understanding the best method for pursuing right conduct. Eternal, because it connected humanity from the early days of the law into the distant future. As such, it also meant something that was always "growing and becoming," in the words of my epigraph to this chapter, taken from *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). For Arnold, "the *infinite* of the religion of Jesus" meant "its immense capacity for ceaseless progress and farther development." This "purposiveness without telos," or *Verwindung*, "lies principally...in the line of extrication more and more his sweet reasonableness" (6:405). *Epieikeia*, therefore, allowed for religion to develop and change, to avoid calcifying into meaningless practices. Arnold felt this was something that could be learned from the physical sciences, which are always in a process of discovery. As he argues in his conclusion to *Literature and Dogma*, "our theologians really suffer, not from having too much science, but from having too little" (6:408). By this he meant that the true test of a religion's effectiveness should be the proof of experience, not abstruse theological reasoning. As with the scientific method, the modern form of which the mathematician Morris Kline attributed to Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), only that which was testable and empirically verifiable could be added to the body of thought.<sup>83</sup> Arnold felt that only by "reading and re-reading the Gospels continually, until we catch something of it" could an understanding of "Christ's method and secret" be found. This was to be compared with the reader's personal experience, in what he called "an experimental process" (6:406). This was the footing on which Arnold sought to place religion.

Thus, we can see Arnold's intervention as being less about religion per se, and more about how to live, more generally. His goal was always to demonstrate that religion continues to perform a useful function in preserving and inculcating right conduct, even (and perhaps especially) if the supernatural is left out of it. Hence, his argument that the Established Church was an important institution, absent the dogma, since it was really to do with the transmission of ethical norms. This focus on conduct, and religion as a possible transmitter, is what makes Arnold useful in our contemporary discussion of what grounds human rights.

### ***Human Rights and the Question of Conduct***

In a recent commentary in *The New York Times Online*, the philosopher Anat Biletzki argues that a religious basis for human rights is not only unnecessary, but detrimental. She begins by quoting Ronald Dworkin, who divides the discussion of the "sacredness" of human life into two camps: those of religious faith, and others "of secular but deep philosophical belief." Representing the former camp are critics like legal scholar Michal Perry, who, arguing for the necessity of religion in *The Law of Human Rights: Four Inquiries* (1998), puts it this way: "The conviction that every human being is sacred is, in my view, inescapably religious—and the idea of human rights, therefore, ineliminably religious" (5). Even though he is quick to concede that simply because the "the only intelligible versions of the conviction are religious is not to say that any religious version is persuasive or even plausible," for Perry, the notion that "every human being is 'inviolable,' has 'inherent dignity,' is 'an end in himself,' or the like" depends on a cosmology that affirms the ultimate meaningfulness of the world (11-12, 16).<sup>84</sup> In his view, this requirement disqualifies positions that, in the words of one critic, "look upon human existence as the product of random chance but hope to maintain a foundation for the idea of human rights" (Cohen 242).

On the other hand are critics like Biletzki, who argues that even when religion seems to be in service of human rights, is actually beholden to divine directive. For Biletzki, the difficulty arises when disagreements occur between religious and non-religious parties, or even within or between religions. In such cases, the divine authority that provided the sanction for claims of human sacredness could also trump such sanction: “if [God] commands a violation of human rights, then so be it. There is no meaning to human *rights* under divine commandment” (Biletzki). This is a compelling point, though one not without a certain degree of irony, according to Nicholas Wolterstorff. In a response appearing in *The Hedgehog Review*, he discusses documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) that ground human rights in human dignity, rather than sacredness. There, Wolterstorff contends that “whereas it is possible to articulate religious reasons for affirming human dignity, and thus for human rights, all non-religious attempts to do so have failed” (“Irony” 67). Wolterstorff argues this primarily because of what he sees as the insufficiency of “dignity-based” approaches, particularly those dependent on “capability” (Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum exemplify the latter). In brief, Wolterstorff argues that capacities approaches fail because there will always be exceptions to the dignity-conferring capacity, whether those suffering from dementia, those severely impaired mentally from childbirth, and so on. Thus, in his view, “the capacities approach...cannot offer an account of the dignity of those human beings who are not capable of functioning as persons” (“Irony” 66).<sup>85</sup> As such, the irony of Biletzki’s position, as Wolterstorff argues, is that while the grounding of human dignity in religion opens the possibility of such dignity being superceded, “only religious defenses for human dignity have proven successful” (“Irony” 69).

My interest is not to argue for the absolute need for religion or against religious foundations for moral codes. Rather, I am interested in how Arnold’s conceptions of “conduct,”

and “righteousness” in particular offer a way out of the so-called “secular-sacred” debate, even while requiring sacrifice and openness from both sides. Like Ruskin, Arnold was loathe to yield his potential audience of religious adherents and the particular vantage that it offered. Arnold challenges non-religious people to consider the Bible as a guide for right conduct, minus the supernatural, even as he challenges religious people to consider and identify with the non-religious perspective that miracles do not (and never did) happen. In doing so, Arnold seeks to place right conduct as the basis of religion, rather than simple assent to a list of abstruse beliefs.

As Anat Biletzki’s essay reveals, the question of “what grounds [conceptions of human rights] *theoretically*,” is one of the most thorny problems with respect to human rights talk. However, Arnold’s very project in *Literature and Dogma* is to dispense with this particular aspect altogether. One of his central arguments is that to base a system on unverifiable first principles, for instance on a “Great personal first cause,” leads to distracting and indeed immaterial discussions which only detract from the true goal: righteousness. For Arnold, it is not important that God be recognized as personal or that he have identifiable attributes at all—what is important is that a notion of conduct clearly precedes any discussion of rights or ethics. In fact, Arnold demonstrates, conduct precedes Christianity itself. For Arnold, religion is useful insofar as it represents the best that men have thought about how to live rightly, even if they were carried away in this goal to the point of indulging in *Aberglaube*.

Arnold’s perspective thus begins to resolve the seeming impasse in the human rights debate. It seems unlikely that we will ever come to agreement over what things precisely constitute human rights, or even what fundamental principles engender or regulate such a notion. Does it matter? Clearly, religious and irreligious partisans would argue that it matters immensely. However, Arnold responds, will a stable and universal definition of such rights help

to achieve their prosecution? Will articulating its origins aid in ensuring its dictates are upheld everywhere? Indeed, the Nazi Holocaust that provoked the 1948 Universal Human Rights Declaration would not have been averted had the document simply been produced a decade earlier. The long list of atrocities committed since are a testament to the impotence of “proper foundations” to the prosecution of right conduct. Arnold’s point, anticipating Nicholas Wolterstorff’s, is simply that religion as a basis of encouraging right conduct should not be dismissed, even in the face of its contingency.

We may not agree on where human rights come from, or even what they are. We *can* all agree that they concern matters of conduct. As Taylor persuasively argues,

The very idea of an individual who might become aware of himself, and then only subsequently, or at least independently, determine what importance others have for him and what he will accept as good, belongs to post-Cartesian, foundationalist fantasy.... We cannot be without *some* sense of our moral situation, *some* sense of our connectedness to others. (“Two Theories” 32)

Taylor’s argument echoes Arnold’s, in that the concept of conduct is foundational to our very identity as human beings, and crucial to any conception of the “good life.” The question is then not *why* we should pursue right conduct, or what grounds such an idea, but rather *how* we can do so. While it is indeed true that he believes a *kind* of Christianity to be the most effective means of reaching this goal, his focus is *the goal*, not the origins of the desire, or the fundamental principles governing it. By de-emphasizing the metaphysics (which is not to say, abandoning them), Arnold can maintain his argument about Christianity’s superiority, but on an experimental and *debatable* basis. In this way, he moves the discussion of religion from a debate between unprovables to an empirical examination, capable of fault and open to falsifiability, even if Arnold is confident that Jesus will reign supreme. This is a view that can be engaged by believers and non-believers alike, and, indeed, one from which both can gain.

As Anthony Langlois aptly puts it, “The language of human rights is fundamentally a normative or ethical language, one that emerges out of the political liberalism of the Enlightenment, and one that leads to a very distinctive form of political engagement” (24). While discussions of conduct are always likely to be political, this particular trajectory has naturally provoked considerable debate. Many have felt that the normative implications of such talk, combined with the specific history of its formation, circumscribe its reach and effectiveness. In such a light, I suggest that we can begin to see Arnold’s contribution as one that helps to broaden participation in the discussion beyond this putatively Western formulation, despite the poet’s own propensity for nationalistic and state-based approaches to the issue (Said).

### *A Postsecular Age?*

That Arnold ultimately underestimated the staying power of traditional religious belief is not to deny his correct assessment that the stakes of the game were certainly changing (at least in the West). Belief no longer taken for granted, metaphysics no longer assumed. His efforts toward “fixing” religion can be seen both as hopeless and incisive. Hopeless, because as Collini and others have pointed out, making God into “a consciousness of the not ourselves that makes for righteousness” strips the traditional notion of God of its wonder and compelling force. Incisive, because Arnold implicitly recognizes that something *has* changed to make this formulation seem sensible. As Taylor has forcefully argued, faith has become contingent in way it had never before been.

For Arnold, this contingency meant shifting his approach to religion entirely. By de-emphasizing the metaphysics, Arnold can maintain his argument about Christianity’s superiority for inculcating right conduct, but on an experimental and *debatable* basis. Religion then becomes

capable of fault and open to being incorrect, even if Arnold is confident that the method and secret of Jesus will reign supreme in producing right conduct, and a path that can be engaged by believers and non-believers alike.

In the end, what Arnold is really after is not to “preserve” religion in another form, though that does end up being one of the potential effects of his intervention. Rather, he wants to show that religion *itself* is merely a reflection of the background constellation of goods that conduct represents; goods that vary by culture and by religion. He does happen to think that the Christian religion, and Christ’s example in particular, is important for England and encouragement of their collective social conduct. At the same time, what is postsecular about this is the recognition that religion and modernity have been mutually constitutive. Christianity shaped European modernity, even as the scientific revolution has shaped the practice of Christianity. This is not surprising, considering that both shaped and were shaped by the culture in which they were embedded. That religion continues to be important should be as much a reflection on the continuing influence of habitus as the persistence of superstition or myth. Or, as Pecora and Gray argue, the fact that myth continues to play an important role in both the scientific and religious realms should not surprise us, considering the fundamental role they play in human society.

A surprising and powerful example of this is the resurgence of so-called “New Atheism,” represented by which Daniel Dennett, the late Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Richard Dawkins, who are in every sense of the word “evangelical” in their desire to see religion eradicated as a disease that leads to all manner of conflict and trouble. As John Gray argues,

The chief significance of evangelical atheism is in demonstrating the unreality of secularization. Talk of secularism is meaningful when it refers to the weakness of traditional religious belief or the lack of power of churches and other religious bodies. That is what is mean when we say

Britain is a more secular country than the United States, and in this sense secularism is an achievable condition. But if it means a type of society in which religion is absent, secularism is a kind of contradiction, for it is defined by what it excludes. Post-Christian secular societies are formed by the beliefs they reject, whereas a society that had truly left Christianity behind would lack the concepts that shaped secular thought. (*Black Mass* 189)

We need not necessarily accept all of Gray's conclusions here to see the value of his polemic. Though the relative weakness of "traditional religious belief" has been the subject of much debate, as he rightly observes, the term "secular" is a meaningless one absent the historical backdrop of the religious tradition against which it is configured. However, as Taylor's concept of background demonstrates, the indirect influence of religion remains potentially and immeasurably vast. This is presumably what Gray is after in his invocation of "evangelical atheism." The title of Hitchens's book on the subject speaks volumes: *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (2009). There, however, he does concede that "Religious faith is, precisely because we are still-evolving creatures, ineradicable" and will never die, "or at least not until we get over our fear of death, and of the dark, and of the unknown, and of each other" (12). And yet, despite this stark admission, the remainder of Hitchens's book seeks to argue precisely for that eradication, providing the reasons why religion should be eliminated, as it contaminates all that it touches.

Indeed, that such a book need even be written, not to speak of the wide and divided response it generated, seems to make Gray's point. In a truly "secularized" society—in the strong sense of being "beyond" religion—a call for the elimination of religion would be unnecessary. A truly "secularized" society would simply have already rejected and dismissed religion wholesale, in the same way that people worldwide have rejected the notion of an earth-centered universe. Indeed, as Hitchens himself argues, there is something about religion that cannot be overturned

as easily as outdated science, perhaps even for the reasons he enumerates. This is a fact that the New Atheists have collectively overlooked in their stark opposition to religion as such.

In contrast stand books like Alain de Botton's *Religion for Atheists: A Non-believer's Guide to the Uses of Religion* (2012). Following in the footsteps of Arnold, de Botton argues that it should nonetheless be possible to remain a committed atheist—as he is—“and nevertheless find religions sporadically useful, interesting and consoling” and, furthermore, to be “curious as to the possibility of importing certain of their ideas and practices into the secular realm” (11-12). Following Arnold, de Botton's larger point is that even if we accept that God does not exist, and that the Bible is therefore merely a collection of wisdom writing passed down over the centuries, it is not, therefore, any less useful as a guide for human action. Indeed, if written by humans without the benefit of divine inspiration, all the more reason to see it as a trans-historical account of the validity of *conduct* as the basis for morality, and to see the practices that attend religions as answering fundamental needs inherent in the human condition. Such practices include, among others, “how to generate feelings of community, how to promote kindness...how better to acknowledge our own childlike needs, how to surrender some of our counterproductive optimism...and how to coalesce the scattered efforts of individuals interested in the care of souls and organize them under the aegis of institutions” (311).

What is important, ultimately, about Arnold's work is certainly not whether he was himself religious.<sup>86</sup> Nor is it about the controversy his religious writings invited, though such a backlash can tell us much about the cultural moment in which they were produced (as a metric of religiosity, perhaps). The key aspect I have tried to demonstrate here, rather, is how the body of Arnold's work, interpreted through the lens of Taylor's own view of secularity, begins to show us what work religion does and can do intellectually and philosophically. In particular, I have

attempted to show how the cross-pressures of tradition, scientific discovery, and social practices make themselves apparent when examining religion, and vice-versa. In demonstrating this process, both in his poetry and prose, Arnold stands as an exemplary case of a postsecular thinker: one who not only recognizes the mutual constitutivity of modernity and religion, but examines the potential implications of this process.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> John Rosenberg relates the story of Gandhi's 1908 translation of Ruskin's book into his own dialect of Gujarati, in *The Darkening Glass*. In the pages of *Unto This Last*, Gandhi relates, "I discovered some of my deepest convictions... and that is why it so captured me and made me transform my life" (132). In his introduction to the collection *John Ruskin: Unto This Last and Other Writings*, Clive Wilmer recounts how a survey of the first twenty-nine Labour MPs revealed that the book which had influenced them most profoundly was *Unto This Last*. For more on this connection, see Goldman.

<sup>2</sup> Following José Casanova, I take "functional differentiation" to mean the emancipation of the "secular" spheres of the state, the economy, and science from religious institutions and norms. Casanova accepts this as the core of the theory of secularization, while rejecting the fallacy of confusing this historical process with the marginalization and disappearance of religion.

<sup>3</sup> For recent accounts, see Mahmood; Viswanathan.

<sup>4</sup> Addressing the same point, Jürgen Habermas draws upon John Rawls's theory of the "public use of reason" to frame his own position that religious discourse be tolerated—and, indeed, welcomed—in the public sphere, with the understanding that it be translated into non-religious terms in the legislative one ("Religion").

<sup>5</sup> By "deep pluralism" Connolly refers to the ideal social formation of the agonistically pluralist position, in which competing constituencies are able to articulate their platforms publically—in unadulterated form—in an atmosphere of humility and respect, while striving for consensus on what they recognize to be mutually beneficial solutions. This is different from other forms of pluralism, which tend toward communitarianism and thus emphasize "difference" to the potential subversion of consensus. For more on Connolly's particular take on pluralism, see Schoolman and Campbell.

<sup>6</sup> Regenia Gagnier has also described the nineteenth-century roots of Francis Fukuyama's influential neoliberal thesis in *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), though she argues that it is indebted more to Charles Babbage than "the early political economists, who typically understood the structural flaws of laissez-faire" (62). While it is true that classical economists like the early J.S. Mill "may have equivocated on laissez-faire," as Willie Henderson argues, "in places of business such as Leeds, Bradford and Manchester, and in journalistic reviews, exemplified especially by reviews of Ruskin's essays on political economy, laissez-faire was an unconditional truth" (25). For more on the complicated relationship between Victorian liberalism and modern-day neoliberalism, see Goodlad, "Character" (esp. 238–244) and Booth.

<sup>7</sup> For more on Chalmers, see Goodlad *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State* 39–48; Poovey 98–115.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the influence of Xenophon on Ruskin's thinking about economics, see Petrochilos; Birch 55–60.

<sup>9</sup> In his brief biography of Ruskin, Robert Hewison describes John La Touche in further detail as "a follower of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, by whom he was...baptized as an evangelical Baptist in 1863" (78). John's daughter, Rose La Touche, was the object of Ruskin's ardent affections, and their tragic affair ended in her death marks for many scholars the beginning of his psychological decline. For more on their relationship, see Hoare.

<sup>10</sup> A description of La Touche taken from one of Ruskin's letters to the "Winnington girls," quoted in Hilton's *John Ruskin* (290).

<sup>11</sup> Describing Ruskin's writing as "word-paintings," George Landow explains his term as being a way to capture the means by which Ruskin "enable[s] us to see with his heightened powers," and which "communicate the experience of his intense encounter with the visual world" (*Ruskin* 18). For more on the importance of seeing to Ruskin, see Helsinger.

<sup>12</sup> Camlot does argue elsewhere that Ruskin's decision to publish in the *Cornhill Magazine*, and not in a smaller, religious publication, led to his being castigated by reviewers for bringing "biblical discourse in the domain of science" (95).

<sup>13</sup> For an account of Ruskin as a "sage writer" see Landow, *Elegant Jeremiahs*.

<sup>14</sup> See Henderson, esp. Chapter 6, "John Ruskin Reading John Stuart Mill," pp. 107-24. There, Henderson examines Ruskin's personal library copy of Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*, detailing and analyzing Ruskin's extensive marginalia, demonstrating the connections between Mill's seminal work and Ruskin's *Unto This Last*.

<sup>15</sup> My own reading of *Unto This Last* diverges from Spears's in that while he is keen to emphasize the disjunction between the belief and practice of Christian values in the Victorian market, he does not recognize that certain evangelical beliefs actually resonate with a *laissez-faire* approach to political economy. Thus, while he argues that Ruskin "rooted social action in the Christian concept of individual moral responsibility" (139), he does not account for the ways that evangelicals often interpret this responsibility in ways that lead them to be less, rather than more, charitable.

<sup>16</sup> As John Tyree Fain points out, "in so far as Ruskin's indictment applied to the work of the best exponents of nineteenth-century orthodox political economy, it is unsound. In so far as his indictment applied to the misuse of that doctrine by politicians and industrialists, it is sound" (69).

<sup>17</sup> In his book *John Ruskin and the Ethics of Consumption* (2006), David Craig charts Ruskin's "movement away from a belief-centered to a practice-centered model of religions," arguing that such an evolution led Ruskin to "view the normative offerings of religions as one more set of ethical resources—one more cultural source of moral visions of the good—to bring to the forum of public discourse" (24). In Craig's view, Ruskin's "appreciative recognition" of the formative authority "binding practices" like religion, despite the art critic's own complicated faith journey, "distinguishes his religious criticism from the secular theories of figures like Marx and Mill" (337). While Craig does address Ruskin's critique of the "moderate" evangelical Victorians and their embrace of *laissez-faire* economics, as described by Boyd Hilton, he is ultimately more concerned with portraying the author of *Unto This Last* as a moralist concerned with proper consumption, contrasted with the "production" which captivated J.S. Mill, rather than as a critic of the resonance between Victorian capital and Protestantism.

<sup>18</sup> Russel Edward Kacher argues that this traditional narrative has been overstated by Ruskin biographers, though he concedes that *Unto This Last* was not well received.

<sup>19</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Ruskin quotations are taken from the Library Edition of *The Works of John Ruskin*, E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds. 39 vols. (London: Allen, 1903-1912), and are cited by (volume:page number).

<sup>20</sup> In a letter to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Ruskin confesses, regarding his work on *Unto This Last*, his recognition of

the great fact that great Art is of no real use to anybody but the next great Artist; that it is wholly invisible to people in general—for the present—and that to get anybody to see it, one must begin at the other end, with moral education of the people, and physical, and so I've to turn myself quite upside down... (Cited in Rosenberg 101-02).

<sup>21</sup> The fairness of Ruskin's characterization of classical economics, and its reliance on the economic man in particular, has been the subject of much critique. Most note that Mill (who was in many respects a reformer of classical economics) acknowledged the "hypothetical" nature of the "economic man" illustration, and that Ruskin's argument consists, therefore, on somewhat of a straw man attack.

<sup>22</sup> Cook and Wedderburn also note George Eliot's mixed reaction to Ruskin's economic writing, in a letter to "Miss Sara Hennell" dated January 17, 1858: "I don't know whether you look out for Ruskin's books whenever they appear. His little book on *The Political Economy of Art* contains some magnificent passages, mixed up with stupendous specimens of arrogant absurdity on some economical points" (16.xxiii).

<sup>23</sup> Harris notes that this recession "brought widespread disenchantment with, and reaction against, the mechanistic and impersonal structures of the 1834 Poor Law" (14). Harris goes on to relate how "the late 1870s brought the onset of the so-called 'Great Depression', and during the 1880s there was a traumatic housing, unemployment, and public order crisis in many of Britain's major cities" (15). The conditions which led to a rise in Ruskin's reputation only reinforce the relevance of Ruskin to our current economic crisis. The parallels include not only the avarice of the market leading to a financial disaster, in the case of the pervasive, exploitative securitization of debt, but also the absence of meaningful labor leading to an over-consumption fed by an unsustainable credit market. Ruskin's response to similar crises in his own time, as discussed below, include a profound revision of the nature of "merchants" and a rejoinder to become wiser consumers—both relevant to our current economic situation.

<sup>24</sup> Though she makes the argument that by *The Queen of the Air* (1869) Ruskin's new reliance on "secular tradition" was due to the "major change in his religious views" (253), Elizabeth Helsinger notes that prior to 1860 this would have been unacceptable to the art critic. She describes a debate "sometime in the late 1850s" between F. J. Furnivall, F. D. Maurice and R. C. Trench who all held in contempt literal readings of the Bible, and Ruskin, who argued that "the Bible was intended to speak directly to simply people at all times—in other words, that it should be taken as the literal word of God and not as a human text written in an historically changing language" (257).

<sup>25</sup> For Mill's discussion of the solution for the low wage problem, including a fixed minimum, see "Of Popular Remedies for Low Wages," in *Principles of Political Economy*, pp. 441-45.

<sup>26</sup> The near-ubiquity of minimum wage legislation among countries around the world seems to indicate a general lack of faith in the equilibrating effect of competition on pay. According to a recent Global Wage Report issued by the International Labour Organization, 90% of the world's population lives in countries where a minimum wage is guaranteed by law (64).

<sup>27</sup> Ruskin is clear that "good" may be defined beyond the pecuniary. As examples, he gives, "protective watchfulness of his master's interest and credit" and "joyful readiness to seize unexpected and irregular occasions of help" (17:30). These examples, however, contribute to Ruskin's definition of true wealth, as opposed to "illth." This distinction is taken up in his fourth chapter, "Ad Valorem," and is discussed below.

<sup>28</sup> Boyd Hilton, among others, points out how Mill's position on this issue changed over the course of the century. As he suggests in *The Age of Atonement*, "Mill is just one thinker who moved from support of *laissez-faire* in industrial relations in 1848 to support for trade unions by the 1860s, for there was a growing consensus in favour of 'social reform'" (267).

<sup>29</sup> This distinction forms the basis for his second chapter, "The Veins of Wealth." In one sense, however, history has sided with Mill. Mill's theorization of "utility," combined with the work of the marginalists William Stanley Jevons (1835-82), Carl Menger (1840-1921), and Léon Walras (1834-1910), ushered in the neoclassical revolution. Neoclassical theory marked the dropping of the term "political," in an attempt to create a more empirical science of economy. As such, the study of economics appeared to follow the route of functional differentiation. In another sense, however, modern economists have come to acknowledge the roles that altruism and social behavior play on determining economic behavior, vindicating Ruskin. For an examination of the marginalists and their influence on both Victorian and modern economic theory, see Gagnier.

<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Ruskin uncovers one of the fundamental flaws in capitalism: its emphasis on short-term self-interest. Under the unregulated capitalist model which classical political economists favored, there is no incentive to defer the opportunity for immediate gain at the expense of others, unethical or ultimately unsustainable though it might be, in favor of long-term, systemic stability. Indeed, Alan Greenspan, former Federal Reserve chairman, related as much in his testimony before Congress regarding the subprime mortgage crisis, contributed to in large part by his push for deregulation in financial instruments like derivatives. His now-famous admission states, "Those of us who have looked to the self-interest of lending institutions to protect shareholders' equity, myself included, are in a state of shocked disbelief" (Andrews B1). Needless to say Ruskin would not have been shocked. Here, as elsewhere, Greenspan has confessed—unironically—to confusion and surprise that greed could have led to such a catastrophic result.

<sup>31</sup> For more on Ruskin's interest in good consumption, see Craig.

<sup>32</sup> For more on Mill and the religion of humanity, see, among others, Raeder; T.R. Wright 40-50; Cowling 77-93.

<sup>33</sup> For Ruskin's own involvement in the religion of humanity, see Alexander, especially pp. 161-170.

<sup>34</sup> For a productive reading of the key differences in both writing style and systems of thought, see Henderson, who concludes that "To understand mid-nineteenth-century economic representations, we need to read Ruskin and Mill against each other" (143).

<sup>35</sup> For detailed statistical and geographical data on the Irish immigration and its effect on the Victorian Catholic population, see Snell and Ell, particularly pp. 173-84.

<sup>36</sup> For more on the nineteenth-century sources of anti-Catholic feeling in both Britain and the United States, see Griffin. For more on the causes of Catholic-Protestant tension, with a particular eye toward the nineteenth century, see Wheeler.

<sup>37</sup> For a provocative attempt to explore the possibilities of a trans-levantine religious pluralism that includes Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Druze, see Benjamin Disraeli's *Tancred* (1845).

<sup>38</sup> For more on this narrative trajectory, see Nigel Rapport, "A cosmopolitan turn?"

<sup>39</sup> Craig Calhoun, "Cosmopolitanism in the modern social imaginary," p. 110.

<sup>40</sup> Indeed, as Bruce Robbins points out in his introduction to *Cosmopolitics*, echoing Gopal Balakrishnan, religion, in addition to being "certainly considered worth dying for by many" is "at

least as cosmopolitan as it is national” (7). And yet, as Robbins continues later, “[c]apital may be cosmopolitan, but that does not make cosmopolitanism into an apology for capitalism” (8). These examples are used to undergird Robbins’s call for a more critical cosmopolitanism which, as Calhoun and Van der Veer point out, is often not sympathetic to religion’s inclusion in the discussion.

<sup>41</sup> Mouffe anchors her argument on what she perceives to be the fundamental paradox that underlies democracy. That is, in a liberal democracy, “what cannot be contestable...is the idea that it is legitimate to establish limits to popular sovereignty in the name of liberty”; in other words, democracy can only go so far in articulating the will of the people (*Democratic Paradox* 4). For Mouffe, the irreconcilability of the logics of equality and liberty are not enervating, but rather energizing, as the heart of a pluralist democratic politics consists not in absolute logical coherence, but rather “pragmatic, precarious and necessarily unstable forms of negotiating its constitutive paradox” (*Democratic Paradox* 11). For more on this, see both Mouffe’s *The Return of the Political* (2005) and her essay “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?” For a different version of the paradox of democratic legitimation, and its relation to cosmopolitanism, see Benhabib, esp. pp. 32-36.

<sup>42</sup> This is not to say that consensus per se is impossible, or that we should not strive for it. As Connolly has argued elsewhere, postsecularism encourages secularists to negotiate in good faith “until they establish the *positive capacity* to fix their own moral practice as necessary and universal” (*Secularist* 7). Rather, it is to acknowledge that neither secular nor religious “instruments” have as yet definitively demonstrated their position to convince all others, and thus to enjoin normativity. As such, we should not use as a justification for secularism the argument that secular sources of moral practice are somehow more capable of producing consensus.

<sup>43</sup> For another account of the religious underpinnings of “the secular” see John Gray’s *Straw Dogs* (2002) and *Black Mass* (2007).

<sup>44</sup> The sociologist Peter Berger has expressed reservations about the blanket use of the term “fundamentalism” when applied to Islam, pointing out its historical origins in American Protestantism. He defines fundamentalism more sharply as “any project to restore taken-for-grantedness in the individual’s consciousness<sup>3</sup> and therefore, necessarily, in his or her social and/or political environment” (“Pluralism” 21). This is particularly germane to our discussion here, as such a project can have (and has had) both religious and secular formations. Berger’s important point is that the same sense of loss or nostalgia animating religious fundamentalisms animates secular formations as well — a reality that should chasten both secular critiques of religion and religious critics of secularism alike, in addition to awakening postsecularists to the stakes of the contest.

<sup>45</sup> A secondary element of Anderson’s argument is a critique of the particular feminisms animating classic readings of Victorian novels. In contrast to Anderson’s liberal feminism, recent feminist accounts have shown how a postsecularism influenced by poststructural thought can contribute to understandings of female agency (e.g., the empowering practice of religious “piety” traditionally read as repressive). For more, see Braidotti and Mahmood. Such a perspective is useful, I argue, in correctly reading the ways in which Lucy Snowe’s participation in and valuation of religious practices (like the confessional) can be read as conscious, reasonable and empowering acts, rather than as her unconscious repression by a patriarchal religious system.

<sup>46</sup> Even the particulars of devotional practice in the second half of the century served to divide Protestants from Catholics. As Doreen Rosman notes, in addition to the increasing dominance of the clerisy in Catholic matters, “The gulf between Catholic and Protestant was widened by a revival of Catholic devotional practice. In the second half of the century attendance at Mass and confession improved, new types of devotion were introduced from the continent, and indigenous forms of piety became more widespread” (216). For more on the effect of church development on the increasing rift between Protestant and Catholic practitioners, see Rosman, particularly pp. 207-232.

<sup>47</sup> Indeed, as Paz notes, “the indignation prompted a massive petition drive that garnered 2,616 memorials to the Queen protesting the new hierarchy, bearing 887,525 signatures (roughly five percent of the English population)” (Paz 11).

<sup>48</sup> That said, most of the more recent readings of the novel’s Catholic sympathies tend to focus somewhat simplistically on Lucy’s (and by extension Brontë’s) vexed fascination with the Catholic church—both attraction and repulsion—reading it as mirroring Victorian attitudes toward the same. For examples, see Edgren-Bindas, Schiefelbein, and Vejvoda.

<sup>49</sup> Such readings often ignore the religiously diverse context of *Labassecour* itself. As we are told in chapter 36, in addition to the Catholic churches, the town has “three Protestant chapels” (418) representing three distinct denominations, each of which Lucy visits in turn.

<sup>50</sup> For more on the *unheimlich* in *Villette*, along with a reading of the frequent puns on “home” in the text, see Hennelly, Jr.

<sup>51</sup> While Griffin and Peschier have most recently made the connection between typical nineteenth-century anti-Catholic fiction and the Gothic, Brontë’s account differs from such works in important ways. For instance, a strong realist strain undergirds *Villette*, and each of the anti-Catholic tropes (e.g., the “ghostly nun,” the “dangerous priest” and the confessional scene) are deconstructed, explained scientifically and exposed ironically in the style of Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1817). Compared with typical Victorian anti-Catholic diatribes, full of the supernatural and caricatures of nuns and priests seeking to corrupt innocent Protestants, *Villette* portrays its Catholic characters as scheming and devious, but more self-interested than simply evil, or seeking to corrupt. Even when Madame Beck schemes against Lucy, and in the latter half of the novel with the help of Père Silas, never do we sense resentment from the narrator, and Lucy often notes her respect for both. The eventual acceptance between Lucy and M. Paul of their mutual faiths also undermines readings of the novel as anti-Catholic, even as the novel portrays the fundamental conflict in the novel between Lucy and Madame Beck as one of jealousy, rather than religion *per se*.

<sup>52</sup> As referenced in Tim Dolin’s footnote to *Villette* (510).

<sup>53</sup> Emily W. Heady reads Lucy’s attending of confession as “her attempt at psychic self-healing” which fails miserably, as she leaves “not less but more alienated, not just lonely but also misunderstood” (351-52). This reading echoes that of Diana Peschier who, placing the narrative in the context of nineteenth-century anti-Catholic discourse, argues that the confessional presents “danger for Lucy Snowe who is vulnerable because of her loneliness and her repressed sexual feelings” (160). Susan Griffin, in a work also examining nineteenth-century anti-Catholic fiction, argues that this danger extends beyond the novel, suggesting that “Brontë and Lucy Snowe...both fear that confession also entails a dangerous ceding of the self” (153). Both Peschier and Griffin follow Susan David Bernstein’s own influential reading of the confessional

scene, also inflected by Victorian anti-Catholic rhetoric which saw the confessional as a threat to “sexual purity” (47). Bernstein thus reads the novel as one more example of “gendered disempowerment in Victorian culture” (71). Such readings can be contrasted with those which take Lucy’s refusal to confess to Père Silas as a point of agency and independence. For Rosemary Clark-Beattie, “Lucy’s refusal to confess is an explicitly Protestant act” (824) which reaffirms her membership in an English community she has fled in coming to Labassecour. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar also famously suggested, as a reading of the text’s silence on the particulars of Lucy’s confession, that Lucy “can only confess that she does not belong in this narrow space which cannot contain her” (415). Taking a slightly different if not unrelated approach, Irene Taylor argues that Lucy’s final, and actual, confession is to M. Paul rather than Père Silas in any case (260). Exceptions to these two main strands of reading include Maria LaMonaca’s *Masked Atheism* (2008), which interprets Lucy’s confession as a symbol of her erotic redemption (85), and John Maynard’s *Brontë and Sexuality* (1984), which argues that the novel represents Brontë open and mature description of sexual development, rather than an expression of anguish about patriarchal repression.

<sup>54</sup> For a reading which incorporates Brontë’s biography and demonstrates the sensitivity Brontë had to the issues of her day, and the way in which her work engages with them, see Heather Glen’s *Charlotte Brontë: The Imagination in History* (2004).

<sup>55</sup> Helene Moglen has astutely observed that their relationship is “a nightmarish parody of her situation with Miss Marchmont and a bizarre echo of Jane Eyre’s ambivalent dream of carrying the fretful, burdensome child to its death” (209).

<sup>56</sup> Naturally, the question arises as to what the implications would be had Lucy and M. Paul not shared a common belief in Christ and the Bible. One imagines that the consequences for their romance would be disastrous. Clearly, Brontë uses the romantic device to emphasize precisely the obstacle that religion can pose to the deepest of emotional connections, and one way in which it might be overcome. That said, while Brontë’s imagining of one particular inter-national and trans-religious encounter does not explicitly reach beyond partisans from the same faith tradition, fortunately for international relations, mutual respect and engagement need not require the depth of emotional commitment required of wedded bliss. Furthermore, as I am keen to suggest both here in Brontë’s case and in the chapters succeeding this one, not only different faith traditions but also secularists share much more than is commonly acknowledged. As the work of Matthew Arnold (Chapter Three) and Benjamin Disraeli (Chapter Four) show, people of all belief systems have much to learn from each other. In Arnold’s case, we can see an argument for the continuing value of religion (albeit in a slightly different form) for even a secular state. In the case of Disraeli, we can see the mutual recognition of value between religious adherents as diverse as Judaism, Christianity, and those of the Druze community (Islam). And, while it may be true that the nineteenth-century imagination could not see beyond branches of the Abrahamic tradition, if history serves to teach any lessons, those closest in similarity have seemed to experience the fiercest of contestations. Should nineteenth-century writers only resolve the tension in these disputes (e.g., between Christians and secularists, Catholics and Protestants, Protestants and Jews, etc.), they should be doing very well indeed.

<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the fact that Thormählen could claim in her introduction that her book-length project was the first to “attempt to situate the Brontë novels in the context of early and mid nineteenth-century religion” (i) is evidence of the lack of sustained critical attention to the impact of religion

on Victorian thought. That said, for recent attempts to correct this deficit, see Fraser, de la Oulton and Nixon.

<sup>58</sup> See Nathan A. Scott's "Arnold's Version of Transcendence" in *The Journal of Religion* (1979) and David DeLaura's seminal *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England* (1969).

<sup>59</sup> See Martha Salmon Vogeler's "Matthew Arnold and Fredric Harrison: The Prophet of Culture and the Prophet of Positivism."

<sup>60</sup> For an interesting discussion of the limits of the term "secular," see Benson ("That False Struggle"), who argues that, considering the polemical bent the term has taken (i.e., as being "anti-religion"), "[p]erhaps it is time to jettison 'secular' as much as possible in our discussions of religion and the public square" ("That False Struggle" 23). For a fuller analysis of the distinction between modern usages of the term "secularism" and that originating from the term's inventor, George Holyoake, see Benson, "Considering Secularism."

<sup>61</sup> For an interesting debate on the meaning of the term "postsecular" with respect to Jürgen Habermas' recent, though not unproblematic, turn to the topic, see John D. Boy's post to the Social Science Research Council's Charles Taylor-inspired blog "The Immanent Frame" and Vincent P. Pecora's subsequent critical response ("The post-secular"). Interestingly, Pecora's complaint that the term "post-secular" is ambiguous and therefore not useful can, increasingly, be applied to the term "secular" as well.

<sup>62</sup> For a slightly different view of the permanence of the "immanent frame," see José Casanova's essay in Warner et al.'s *Varieties of Secularism*. There, he argues that Taylor's western-European frame of reference and exploration prejudices his conclusions, particularly with respect to the impossibility of alternatives to "secularity 3," speculating about "new modern forms...of postaxial transcendence beyond human flourishing" which could become widely available (e.g., "post-Hindu, post-Buddhist, post-Confucian, post-Muslim") outside of the "non-Western civilizations" from which they might originate. Nonetheless, he concedes that "it is futile to try to prophesy the possible forms and contents of such postsecular social imaginaries" (281).

<sup>63</sup> Indeed, for John A. McClure, the postsecular awareness of contingency can be seen to shape contemporary fiction in key ways. McClure invokes historian of religion Mircea Eliade in identifying two challenges facing such fiction: "The first is to fashion compelling spiritually inflected alternatives to the most relentlessly secular modes of seeing and being, and the second is to ensure that these alternatives will leave room for reflection, disagreement, difference, and innovation" (*Partial Faiths* 12). In recognizing these challenges, McClure argues that "postsecular novelists invite readers to view with respect not only a host of postsecular innovators and adventurers but also those less radical innovators who work within familiar forms of traditional religiosity or refuse to abandon completely the traditional faiths *they cannot fully affirm*. This is, for me, simply one more sign of the sophistication and seriousness of contemporary postsecular fiction" (196, my emphasis).

<sup>64</sup> For an examination of the implications of this line of thought with respect to Liberal thought, see Mehta.

<sup>65</sup> See Chapter 1 for a more in-depth discussion of the moral implications of *laissez-faire*, particularly the section entitled "Theorizing the Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine."

<sup>66</sup> For more on this, see Vattimo.

<sup>67</sup> Thanks are due to Julia Saville for this observation.

<sup>68</sup> One is reminded of Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "Break, Break, Break," written in 1835 as an elegy for Arthur Henry Hallam. Tennyson's poem anticipates many of the same themes of the immediacy of loss contrasted with its inevitability and constancy. Like Arnold's poem, the backdrop is the crashing of the sea against the "cold gray stones."

<sup>69</sup> Naturally, much has been made of Arnold's relationship with the Romantics. Michael O'Neill suggests that Arnold's poems "engage in an inexhaustible dialogue with the work of Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, and Keats" (109), while Isobel Armstrong goes so far as to argue that Arnold's relationship to Wordsworth can be seen as "an essentially personalised oedipal struggle with the precursor poet," with all the conflict and confrontation such an engagement entails (3). Furthermore, Alice Stitelman responds to critics to read Arnold as "anti-Romantic" by pointing out how the speaker of poems like "The Buried Life" is "very much identified with the living force itself and significantly selects images from the natural world to talk about what is important in life" (137-8).

<sup>70</sup> Harvey Kerpneck suggests that the reference to Achilles—one that has long puzzled scholars—is a humorous one, poking fun at John Henry Newman's conviction in the "Achilli Trial." As Kerpneck explains, Newman had taken a "Dr. Giacinto Achilli" to task in a lecture, Achilli having set himself up as a sort of a "figurehead for anti-Catholic agitation." The result was a two-year long libel trial, after which Newman was "fined £100...and given a token sentence of imprisonment until the fine was paid" (394). While Kerpneck's interesting connection may strike us as a bit labored, he is right to suggest that it opens the ironic possibilities of the poem, and that such a reading does much to temper the apparent sullenness of the last six stanzas. Nonetheless, many interpretations of the poem abound that see the narrator not only representing the thought of Arnold himself but doing the "recuperative" work of reclaiming "the nobility of Victorian grief." For examples, see Trotter; Wilkenfeld.

<sup>71</sup> One thinks here of Georg Simmel's essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903) on the dulling effect of the city on the intellect and the problems attending "modern life." The speaker in "Stanzas" appears to embody the "blasé attitude" Simmel describes as resulting from the "intensification of nervous stimulation" accompanying city living (175). Though, as I am arguing here, Arnold examines the idea here through the effective dramatization of his speaker's position.

<sup>72</sup> There is no space here to delve into the compelling connections being made between ecocriticism and postcolonial studies, but the connections resound throughout Arnold's "Nature" sonnets. For more on postcolonial ecocriticism, among others, see Huggan and Tiffin; Laura Wright; Carrigan; DeLoughrey and Handley.

<sup>73</sup> The question of science versus other modes of knowledge production has significant contemporary and Victorian resonances, which I have had to leave out of the discussion here. For useful resources on the Huxley/Arnold debate and its parallel in the Snow/Leavis controversy of the 1960s, see White; Kimball.

<sup>74</sup> The quote appears in Anderson, fn. 96.

<sup>75</sup> James Livingston complains that Arnold's religious writing relies on aesthetics rather than argument, and that he "transmutes the Christian religion into subjective feeling" (9). On the other hand, Amanda Anderson purposely neglects Arnold's religious writing of the 1870s, arguing that it "tend[s] toward a kind of mysticism" (96).

<sup>76</sup> All references to *Literature and Dogma* are taken from R. H. Super's edition of Arnold's *Complete Prose Works* and are cited by (volume: page number).

<sup>77</sup> In one of his most humorous inside jokes to readers familiar with *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold pointedly refuses here to address the aristocracy—those “Barbarians” of his earlier work—that forms the last third of his cultural analysis. As he argues, “Keeping in remembrance what Scripture says about the young man who had great possessions, to be able to work a change of mind in our aristocratic class we never have pretended, we never shall pretend” (6:166).

<sup>78</sup> In a typically arch aside, Arnold's reason for citing “M. Littré” is out of a “hope to make our peace with the Comtists by quoting an author or theirs in preference to those authors whom all the British public is now reading and quoting” (6:174). His nod to the Comtists is therefore simultaneously undercut by his suggestion of their being completely overlooked by the British public—a situation that Arnold is clearly sympathetic to, not harboring much sympathy for the “religion of humanity” himself. Thus, we have an example of the irony that Arnold's prose is famous for.

<sup>79</sup> There is not space here to explore all the implications of Arnold's racial theories. For an extensive discussions of these, and his “Celticism” in particular, see Castle, and chapters on Arnold from Anderson and Pecora's *Secularization and Cultural Criticism*.

<sup>80</sup> Of course, Arnold's tacit approval of imperialism and colonialism problematizes his approval of the Christian mission. However, this is a criticism for another work.

<sup>81</sup> For more on the connection between Arnold and Buddhism, see Whitlark; Caufield, esp. chapter 5.

<sup>82</sup> J. Russell Perkin notes in passing that the word was borrowed from St. Paul (from his second letter to the Corinthians), and meant to portray “Jesus Christ as the embodiment of all human perfection” (34). This reading is somewhat of an oversimplification of Arnold's usage, and I aim to add some of the nuances of what the poet was trying to accomplish.

<sup>83</sup> See Kline, p. 284.

<sup>84</sup> See also, Perry's *Toward a Theory of Human Rights* (2007).

<sup>85</sup> For a more in-depth examination of this argument, see *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*, esp. chapter 15, “Is secular grounding possible?”

<sup>86</sup> Debate about this question continues today. For a recent discussion, see Lipman.

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