

**Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* and Secularisation in Early Modern Germany**

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**TIME: August 6, 2-4pm**

**PLACE: Bankstown, Building 1, Room 1.1.114**

**ABSTRACT:** Charles Taylor's monumental account of a secular modernity in his *A Secular Age* has had wide-spread impact across the humanities. Its historical argument regarding the emergence of a secular age from early modern 'Reform Christianity' has received little sustained historiographic scrutiny however. In this seminar I compare Taylor's account with recent historical research on secularisation in early modern Germany, which is in many ways presents the ideal test case. It turns out that this research not only paints a remarkably different picture to Taylor's, but also allows us to develop insights into his particular style of philosophical history. From this discussion, it emerges that Taylor's account of secularisation projects a particular image of modernity — that suited to a neo-Thomist theological program — in which we are all supposedly afflicted by a longing for a lost transcendent order. If we compare this with the neo-Kantian and post-Protestant narrative of enlightenment modernity — characterised not by a lost transcendence but by the gradual emergence of the rational subject — then we can begin to grasp the phenomenon of 'multiple modernities'; or the projection of rival modernities suited to competing cultural and political programs. It is in this light that we can understand the contemporary significance of Taylor's work.

**BIO:** Ian Hunter is an Australian Professorial Fellow in the Centre for the History of European Discourses at the University of Queensland. He is also a regular visitor to the Centre for Citizenship and Public Policy at UWS. Professor Hunter has published numerous works on the history of political, juridical and philosophical thought, especially in early modern Europe. His publications include: *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (2001) and *The Secularisation of the Confessional State: The Political Thought of Christian Thomasius* (2007).

**The seminar will be followed by refreshments in the X-Lounge.**

**For more information on the seminar series and the activities of the Centre for Citizenship and Public Policy see: <http://www.uws.edu.au/ccpp>**