Content and Context in the Philosophy of Charles Taylor

by

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We accept this thesis as conforming
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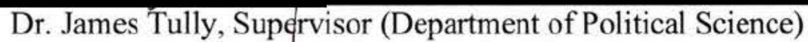

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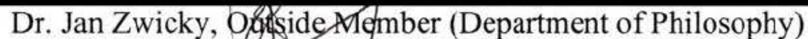

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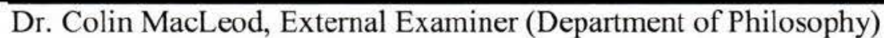

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ABSTRACT

The object of this thesis is to elucidate Charles Taylor's critique of mainstream contemporary moral and political theory. It argues that this requires understanding how this critique fits into Taylor's comprehensive philosophy, which is in turn, it is argued, based on the importance of the content-context distinction in human agency. Each chapter of the thesis examines the role of the content-content distinction in Taylor's analyses of different, but overlapping, domains: 1) human agency and knowledge in chapter one, 2) moral agency in chapter two, 3) contemporary moral theory in chapter three, 4) contemporary political theory in chapter four. A major object of Taylor's criticisms is the tendency to conceive of the content of certain theories about these domains as exhaustive of our understanding of them. Taylor believes that "traditional epistemology" (ch. 1), naturalism (ch. 2), and procedural moral and political theories (chs. 3, 4) fail to come to terms with the inescapable contexts on which these domains and the theories about them depend. The thesis concludes that only with an appreciation of Taylor's sustained efforts at drawing our attention to the contexts that enable human agency can his own moral and political ideas be properly understood and some misconstruals of them corrected.

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INTRODUCTION

Charles Taylor is widely recognized as a major contemporary philosopher.[1] He is perhaps best known for his breadth, having touched on a diverse range of topics over the course of his career: psychology, language, politics, morality to name a few. It is his ideas relating to these last two areas, politics and morality, that form the focus of this thesis. Even in this narrower domain, Taylor's writings are numerous and varied in their concerns. My goal is not to address all of them. Rather, I want to argue for a particular way of reading Taylor that helps to elucidate his moral and political writings. Such elucidation is important for the primary and obvious reason that it gives us a better grasp of what Taylor is trying to tell us about the contemporary world. It is also motivated, to a lesser extent, by the desire to correct what I believe are misconstruals of some of his basic moral and political ideas.[2] It would be very difficult at this point to go into any detailed discussion about the nature of these misconstruals. This is because we first need to understand what Taylor has said before we can see how it has been understood or misunderstood by other theorists. More importantly, however, it is also because of the nature of my interpretation of these misconstruals and what I believe is required to correct them. Although they will only be considered in the Conclusion, they provide a convenient background against which I can lay out what the reading of Taylor I want to argue for involves and why it must proceed in the manner it does.

Briefly, Taylor wants to argue against the proceduralism that he sees in so much contemporary moral and political theory. He wants to draw our attention to what he believes is the role of substantive concerns in our moral and political lives, concerns he claims are largely absent from contemporary theory. This often takes the form of an argument in favour of the good over the right. Moral and political theories generally have a narrow focus on what it is right to do and on the right procedure for determining what it is right to do. Habermas' discourse ethics theory of morality is a good example here. Taylor wants to challenge this narrow focus. He does this in several ways that all have to do with the problem of inarticulacy about substantive issues at the moral and political levels.

One way to challenge this narrow focus is to look at contemporary moral and political theories in their historical perspective. On one reading, the priority of the right over the good that marks these theories can be traced to the Wars of Religion and the Reformation and the dawn of the principle of toleration. Citizens in their political deliberation should concentrate not on religion and other substantive goods but on questions of the right: rights, due process, equality, consent, etc. The present concerns with conceptions of justice (Rawls) and means of validating moral norms (Habermas) follow from this reading. Taylor does not explicitly deny the truth of this account. Rather he incorporates it into his own reading in which he tries to expose various other motives for the narrow focus of these theories by tracing its lineage in the history of the modern Western world and modern philosophy. I will take up this particular account in chapter three. We shall, however, have occasion to consider history and the history of ideas long before then.

In addition to exploring the motives for the inarticulacy about the good that he finds in contemporary moral and political theories, Taylor also investigates the problems and inconsistencies that result from this inarticulacy. For example, contemporary proponents of neutral liberalism hold that the state must fundamentally be neutral between different notions of the good life. The state should strive to promote conditions in which all can pursue their own visions of the good life, so long as they do not adversely affect others. Taylor argues that this aspiration to neutrality is untenable in practice. For example, the allocation of resources in social programs necessarily favour certain interests/commitments above others. Biases in the law (e.g., against same sex couples) also point to this fact. Complete neutrality is practically impossible. Aspiring to it clouds healthy and articulate public debate on real issues and misconceives the role of government. This issue and several other implications inarticulacy about substantive issues has for moral and political theory and practice will be taken up in chapters three and four.

Now it is primarily in this domain of articulacy about the good that the misconstruals I want to look at take root. In response to one of his critics, Taylor writes: "It is obvious that what divides me from Kymlicka, and in general from 'proceduralists', is a quite different view of the human condition."[3] I mentioned above that one of the

reasons it would be difficult to go into these misconstruals right now has to do with my interpretation of them. This quote from Taylor helps clarify what I mean. I do not believe that the misconstruals I want to consider have to do with semantics or a simple difference of opinion. I think they are deeper than that. They stem rather, I would like to maintain, from a difference in views of the human condition. The misunderstanding does not have to do with what Taylor is actually saying, but with the position from which he is speaking. In a word, the misconstruals originate in a failure to understand some of the concepts Taylor uses (e.g., strong evaluation, moral sources) in their proper context. This context is Taylor's theory of moral phenomenology. His elaboration of this theory allows him to carve out a position for himself, one that informs much of what he says in the moral and political domains. It is this position that I want to take up in detail in the first two chapters.

What is unique about Taylor's philosophy is the extent to which his ideas often repose not on the theories of other philosophers but on other parts of his own philosophy. As James Tully puts it,

> In an era of specialisation he is one of the few thinkers who has developed a comprehensive philosophy which speaks to the conditions of the contemporary age in a way that is compelling to specialists in various disciplines and comprehensible to the general reader.[4]

The point to note here is that the range of Taylor's interests I spoke of earlier does not translate into a hodgepodge of disparate writings but rather into "a comprehensive philosophy". Taylor's ideas on epistemology, psychology, language, identity, politics, morality, etc. all combine to form a particular view of the human condition.

My argument then is actually quite simple. I believe that in order to more fully understand Taylor's moral and political ideas, we must attempt to understand the broader philosophy of which they are a part and on which they depend. But this requires interpretation—how are we to characterize this broader philosophy? How are we to understand the relationship between it and Taylor's moral and political ideas? Much of this thesis is preoccupied with answering these two questions. And this amounts to offering a reading of Taylor's overall philosophical project, on two levels.

First, I maintain that the most accurate way to characterize Taylor's philosophical project is to see it as concerned with understanding human agency. Chapter one is

devoted to unpacking this claim. There I lay out my own reading of Taylor's distinctive approach to the study of human agency. This approach involves a hermeneutical and phenomenological method which seeks to make sense of how human beings live their lives through, in part, uncovering the inescapable structures of human agency. In chapter two, we see how this approach, applied to the domain of moral experience, yields a theory of moral phenomenology that is examined in detail. These two chapters then give us the necessary background to consider, in chapters three and four, Taylor's multi-levelled critique of the proceduralism of contemporary moral and political theory.

But where does this approach come from? What is it based on? The answer to these questions takes us to the second level of my reading. Taylor's project may be concerned with the study of human beings, but what unifies it and gives it coherence is the "agenda"[5] Taylor brings to this study. This agenda, as Taylor himself acknowledges, has negative origins. It derives from his commitment to resisting reductivism in the understanding of human agency. The various types of reductivism Taylor envisions all have their origins in the importation of the natural science model into the human sciences. In chapter one, for example, we will see how Taylor connects the rise of epistemology to the Scientific Revolution. In chapter two, we will encounter Taylor's relentless fight against the naturalist thesis that values must be seen as projections onto a neutral, material world. Finally, in chapters three and four, we will examine Taylor's critique of the narrowing of both moral and political theory by proceduralism. The natural science model, as will be seen, has influence here too.

Reducing values to metaphysical illusions, however, is different from narrowing the focus of moral/political theory. Reductivism is not the only enemy. I would like to argue that the positive origins of Taylor's philosophical project lie in his view of the human condition and that his hermeneutico-phenomenological approach to the study of human agency flows from this. I cannot by any means claim to be able to depict this view in its entirety. But there is one theme that I believe is central. We might call this the content/context distinction. It is this theme that runs through all the alternatives to epistemology, naturalism, and proceduralism Taylor lays out and which we will examine in detail in the course of this thesis. Rather than seeing knowledge as consisting of mental representations that match up with an external world, Taylor proposes that we

follow the lead of thinkers such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein and see knowledge as grounded in practices and the engagement of agents with their world. Any theory of human agency or knowledge must see knowledge (the content) in the context of the background conditions that enable it and give it sense. It must acknowledge and incorporate "the irreducible content-context structure of engaged agency."[6]

In the domain of moral experience we will see how, in order to argue against both naturalism and proceduralism, Taylor has constructed a formidable theory of moral phenomenology. One of the goals of this theory is to set out the background context of moral agency. How does human moral experience work? What is necessary for human beings to be moral beings also? How do we make sense of our lives? By appealing to actual human experience, Taylor tries to show how values and "strong evaluation" are an inescapable part of human life as we know it. He also demonstrates how proceduralism, by neglecting the importance of context, both undercuts itself and leads to inconsistencies and weaknesses.

The examination of the relationship of content and context in contemporary moral and political theories is what this thesis builds towards. In particular, in the final chapter we will examine how this relationship is formulated in theories of "procedural" or "neutral" liberalism. We will also examine its formulation in the theories of justice of Rawls and Habermas and in Taylor's assessment and critique of them. This has important consequences for the study of morality and politics in the contemporary world. We will consider, for example, the connection between an individual's life in the context of her/his family and community and her/his commitment to a more abstract or generalized conception of justice. How important is this background context to a person/group's ability to endorse a conception of justice? How does the reality of cultural pluralism change how we think about justice? My hope is that through a detailed examination of what I believe are the most important elements of Taylor's philosophical project, we will come to a clearer understanding of what Taylor is trying to tell us about the contemporary moral and political world, and, consequently, to a richer and more profound understanding of the contemporary moral and political world itself.

There are thus numerous ways in which I hope to substantiate in what follows my claim that the content-context distinction as understood here lies at the heart of Taylor's

view of the human condition and his philosophical project. What separates Taylor's view from others is his refusal to understand all that is involved in a particular human capacity in terms of theories which, in his opinion, privilege or isolate what are only certain aspects of those capacities. In the following four chapters, we will encounter this refusal and the critique it is based on in our examination of theories of knowledge, moral agency, morality, and politics. If we want to understand ourselves better, we need to be clearer about how many of the theories we use to explain human life, for whatever reasons/motives (which we will examine), have narrow focusses and how they thereby fail to do justice to real human experience in all its complexity. And one path to a greater awareness of this complexity is through the effort to understand the constitutive role of context in human experience.

I: HUMAN AGENCY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

The philosophy of Charles Taylor is concerned with nothing less than the study of human beings. To have as one's subject something so obviously large and wide-ranging would seem to be the very recipe for inviting skepticism about the substance of one's findings. We can, however, dispel any illusions of indeterminacy through an understanding of how this study of human beings is shaped and focussed by Taylor's purposes, in a word, how this study becomes "philosophical anthropology".[1] I could, of course, attempt to define the latter as a shortcut to figuring out what this project of Taylor's is all about. But we will have to remain content, for the moment, with the clues the term itself provides us with, and resist definition, as Plato himself resisted defining the key concept of his own philosophy. This is not because of any particularly mystical or even indefinable quality "philosophical anthropology" possesses. It is only because Taylor's project is indeed so uncommonly comprehensive and generous in its concerns that it would be more wise to approach his ideas right from the start with an open mind, uncluttered by any misleading definitions or preconceptions.

Questions, however, are always good. Or, at least, well-formulated questions. Three such questions can help us to get the ball rolling in this inquiry: 1) "How are we to understand human agency?" 2) "What is it to be human?" 3) "How should human beings live?" These questions are, again, broad ones. At the same time, they are closely related, or so Taylor would want to claim. For example, one of his important early papers runs together questions 1) and 2) as can be seen from the very title of the paper: "What is human agency?"[2] What is important to remember is that together, these questions define the concerns of Taylor's "comprehensive philosophy", mentioned in the Introduction, to which he is always making additions/modifications and within which his political and moral philosophy figure. One way of looking at these questions is to see them, going in order from 1) to 3), as moving from the theoretical to the normative, from the descriptive to the prescriptive, even from the objective to the subjective.

Theory and normativity

Here we immediately enter onto ground well-traversed in this century. This is the ground of the is-ought problem, the "naturalistic fallacy". We would do well here to consider Taylor's position on this issue, if only because it is quite plausibly the one that springs to mind most readily upon reading those three questions above. We can put matters quite simply: for Taylor, theory *cannot but be* normative.[3] What kind of "theory" are we talking about here? Any theory which in some way affects how human beings understand themselves. This qualification links up crucially with a key thesis of Taylor's that human beings are in many ways constituted by their self-understandings, a thesis we will come back to later in this chapter and in chapter two. For example, Freud's theory may claim to be just that—pure theory. However, our knowledge of (and belief in) the subconscious affects how we see ourselves and this in turn affects how we act and think, the realm of the normative. Or take even physiological theories which show us how our bodies operate (e.g., the respiratory, circulatory, digestive systems). These have implicit in them an understanding of what health consists in. Knowledge of these theories again shapes our self-understanding and has the potential to guide our action.

Now, to be sure, Taylor is not claiming that *all* theory is necessarily normative. The examples above were chosen deliberately to illustrate how what would seem to be an objective theory about how things simply are can be normative. It is important to understand here the link Taylor is drawing between the objective/theoretical and the normative. It might well be claimed that no theory is "value-free" in that values and biases are always involved in the process of theorizing itself, e.g., the selecting of information, the particular model used, etc.[4] Although Taylor does not want to deny this, he is more concerned with another connection between theory and values. This is that a theory can help to promote or justify certain values. And it does this not necessarily by explicitly providing us with a theory about how we should live, along the lines of question 3) above. Rather, if it can affect our self-understandings by presenting us with a different way of understanding what/how we are as human beings (along the lines of question 1)), then it can also affect our actions and thoughts, and, therefore, our norms.

This is why, for example, a theory about how atoms bond to form molecules does not affect our self-understandings in any significant way.

It is not, however, a question of drawing a firm line between theory that has this potential and theory that doesn't. In one sense, all theory is normative in some way because, as we saw, Taylor believes human beings are in many ways constituted by their self-understandings. The object of Taylor's attention, however, is more *social* theories which claim to be value-free but which simply can't be. An example illustrating why this is so can be found in Taylor's "Neutrality in Political Science" where he tackles the question head-on.[5] First, he shows how canonical theorists such as Plato and Aristotle, who were eschewed by political scientists in the 50s and 60s for being explicitly normative, actually drew on an explanatory framework in order to make their claims regarding, e.g., the best form of government. Both Plato and Aristotle had a typology of the possible forms of government: aristocracy, tyranny, oligarchy, democracy, etc. Taylor's point is that it is these explanatory frameworks that make canonical theorists of enduring interest to us.[6]

He then goes on to expose the value-ladenness of the supposedly value-neutral theories of contemporary political scientists. Some of the examples he provides here pertain again to classifying forms of government. One theory portrays democracy as the only peaceful alternative between two extremes of a radically divided despotism and a peaceful but minority-rule oligarchy.[7] Taylor points out how this framework is predisposed to favour peaceful societies. For example, you might want to favour minority rule because it allows for better art, or, less trivially, you might favour despotism because its associated violence prevents stagnation. If one were to subscribe to either of these beliefs, it would change the explanatory framework. The framework thus "does secrete a certain value position."[8]

> In general we can see this arising in the following way: the framework gives us as it were the geography of the range of phenomena in question, it tells us how they can vary, what are the major dimensions of variation. But since we are dealing with matters which are of great importance to human beings, a given map will have, as it were, its own built-in value slope. That is to say, a given dimension of variation will usually determine for itself how we are to judge of good and bad, because of its relation to obvious human wants and needs.[9]

If we return now to the claim of Taylor's that opened this discussion, that theory cannot but be normative, we can now distinguish between two related ways in which this holds true. First, we examined how any theory which affects our self-understanding can at least potentially be normative. This fact does not directly deny the purported objectivity of the theory in question. Rather it originates from an understanding of the practice of theorizing as set in a larger, social context. No theory is divorced from this context. At the very least, theory originates out of it. At the same time, a theory, once it is formulated, exists in this context and can therefore be taken up by people to be examined, taught, believed in, rejected, etc. Freudian theory provided a good example here. Thus, as seen from this broader perspective, theories about how we "are" can shape how we see ourselves and this can in turn affect what we think we "should" be or do.

Second, Taylor's analysis of canonical political theory and models in contemporary political science revealed the extent to which both are dependent on explanatory frameworks. These frameworks, by defining "the crucial dimensions through which phenomena can vary,"[10] necessarily have their own built-in value slope, structurally predisposed to seeing, for example, certain outcomes as good and others as bad. Here it is not so much that the theory affects our self-understanding as, prior to that, it inevitably structures our way of seeing things, picks out for us the features that matter, etc., and in this it is inescapably normative. For example, to return to the classification of forms of government for a moment, we might seek to justify oligarchy as superior to democracy because human beings are happier when they are uneducated (assuming only the few at the top will be educated in an oligarchy). But others insist that democracy is better because human beings want to govern themselves.[11] Theories which define the spectrum as despotism-democracy-oligarchy, for example, portray the two extremes in obviously undesirable terms at least partly because self-government is threatened. And *this* in turn shows that self-government is seen as being important to people, as mattering to them and as valued by them. Taylor's point is therefore that the dimensions of variation of a political theory, the framework, is inevitably linked to "a given conception of the schedule of human needs, wants, and purposes."[12]

Thus, a theory cannot but be normative (i) if it can shape our self-understanding and (ii) insofar as it has a built-in value slope. These two are closely related. In one

sense, (ii) is a subset of "all theories" that is marked off because it involves theories which are themselves normative. A physiological theory, however, is not itself normative in the same sense that a typology of governments is. It is normative mostly because of its ability to fulfill (i) (although, because there is a conception of what good health consists in embedded in the theory, it can be argued to have a built-in value slope as well)[13]. This is to say that theories which fulfill (ii) are "doubly" normative, so to speak, because they must also fulfill (i). Social theories and theories of human agency are of obvious examples of these, and they are precisely the kinds of theories Taylor is most concerned with. As we will see throughout this thesis, it is partly due to the normativity of social theories that Taylor is concerned about how they are framed. Theories which are reductive in nature or focus on a narrow realm of concerns, especially proceduralism in moral and political theory, have a tendency to slide from conceiving of that focus as the product of a deliberate choice to seeing it as what really defines the subject under consideration. That is, the status of the focus as a conscious theoretical decision, is gradually lost from sight. For example, the content of moral theories that results from the decision to focus on issues of the right/justice comes to define what morality is all about, whereas in reality, human morality involves so much more than this. In particular, in chapter three we will consider Taylor's argument that we should see our conceptions of what it is right to do as embedded in a context of what it is good to be.

The origins of Taylor's project: Enlightenment vs Romanticism

We can now return to our three original questions and pursue another direction in which they lead us, namely, their answers. This is not to say that the foregoing was a mere digression. As will become apparent, we will return to the important groundwork it has laid throughout the course of this inquiry into Taylor's philosophy. Taylor is fully aware that, in addition to informing his examination of the ideas of other philosophers, this issue of theory's normative implications is crucially present in his own philosophy. We will encounter this last issue in the next chapter. For the remainder of this chapter, however, we shall be concerned with the former, that is, Taylor's examination of some central positions of modern philosophy and their normative implications.

The questions again are: 1) "How are we to understand human agency?" 2) "What is it to be human?" 3) "How should human beings live?". We are now aware that all three of these questions have a normative component to them. Nevertheless, it seems obvious that this component weighs differently in each case. Surely this is what question 3) is really all about, whereas it is not focally the concern of question 1)? I do not have the space to argue this point here, only to alert us to its presence. It can be said, however, that Taylor is most interested in questions 1) and 2). Question 3), as posed, is not something Taylor considers directly. While he may acknowledge that theory is inescapably normative, there is still a difference between the awareness of this fact as it pertains to a theory of human agency and a theory which is expressly about showing us how we should live. In the terms of the discussion in section I, the focus for Taylor is on the explanatory framework, and not on the normative claims/outcomes. Another way of putting this is to say that these are, after all, three *different* questions.

One answer, or set of answers, to these questions emerges in the 17th century, through the work of Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke. In response to the first question, how are we to understand human agency, their ultimate answer is: mechanistically. ("Ultimate" because dualism was originally a strong contender in this field.[14]) In response to the second question, what is it to be human, the answer is: to be human is to have the capacity for rationality which consists in the capacity to frame representations of the world. And finally the third question, how should human beings live, puts all this together and sees human happiness as consisting in the satisfying of given ends in accordance with tools reason provides, e.g., instructions as to the best means of achieving the ends we have chosen. The classical, and somewhat fantastical, statement of this position is: "Reason is and ought to be, the slave of the passions."[15]

These answers are all elements of what Taylor calls "the epistemological tradition"[16] which has its origins in the Enlightenment. This tradition constitutes the key target of Taylor's critical philosophy. Rounding things out is Taylor's mining of another tradition—loosely, the "Romantic" tradition—whose principles he draws on in his critique of the Enlightenment. This dichotomous presentation of the matter characterizes much of Taylor's writings. Indeed, at the end of an article on theories of language (a topic we shall return to), Taylor portrays the battle between the two different camps as

> one front in the global war between the heirs of the Enlightenment and the Romantics; such as we see in the struggle between technocracy and the sense of history or community, instrumental reason versus the intrinsic value of certain forms of life, the domination of nature versus the need for the reconciliation with nature.[17]

Taylor goes on to say that this "issue concerns the nature of man, or what it is to be human [and] ... so much of this turns on what it is to think, to reason, to create."[18]

We can pause for a moment here and take stock of what we now know. On my reading of Taylor's project, we now have its most basic elements in our hands. The underlying goal of this project is to understand human agency, with the emphasis here on "human". This leads to the closely related question of the "distinctively human" or what it is to be human. In more substantive terms, his project can be seen as negatively generated, i.e., taking root in a critique of the epistemological understanding of human agency, associated with the Enlightenment, and its corresponding (normative) picture of the human agent. In turn, this engenders another, more accurate understanding and picture which draws upon the Romantic tradition. The central flaw of the epistemological understanding of human agency, as we will see, is that it focusses too narrowly on the definition of knowledge and the conscious process involved in attaining it (i.e., the framing of representations), and fails to appreciate the constitutive role of the contexts (i.e., practices, our direct engagement with the world) that both enable and give sense to knowledge. The Romantic tradition points the way to moving in the latter direction. We can now proceed to unpack this reading of Taylor's project in detail.

The scientific world outlook and the epistemological model

What happens in the 17th century is nothing short of a paradigm shift in the West's world outlook. Taylor identifies this move in several of his articles and books as consisting of both a scientific revolution and an epistemological revolution. Taken together, they make up a large part of what we call the Enlightenment.[19] There are several elements that go into the changes involved here and the directions of causality are not always clear. In his account of this movement, as in all his historical writing, Taylor, however, is not concerned with providing what he calls a "diachronic-causal" explanation, i.e., an account of how the Enlightenment actually came about, what caused

it. He is more preoccupied with investigating what made the ideas, the "idées-forces", to use his term, that are associated with the Enlightenment, "convincing/inspiring/moving". It is an "interpretive" question, but it is by no means unrelated to the diachronic-causal story. This is the method he elaborates in *Sources of the Self* as guiding his study of the modern identity; however, it equally holds for his account of the central ideas of the Enlightenment. Indeed, there is significant overlap between the two.[20]

One way of characterizing the paradigm shift that occurred in the 17th century is to see it as a move from an outlook which conceived of the world as a cosmic order of meanings to an outlook of the world as mechanism. In pre-modern Europe the world was understood on the Platonic model as consisting of an ontic logos, as informed by the Idea(s). This 'meaningful' order, as Taylor calls it, was soon Christianized and subsequently seen as emanating from God's will. Humans, needless to say, had to conform to this order and know their place in the "great chain of being".[21]

Taylor actually traces the rise of a mechanistic world outlook to before the 17th century—to the medieval nominalist revolt (associated with William of Occam) against Aristotelian realism. The issue here was one of control. To subscribe to a belief in a fixed, natural order in which ends (*tele*) were also fixed, was to set limits on God's omnipotence and sovereignty. On the Christian understanding, God must possess ultimate control over the universe. "God must preserve the fullest freedom to establish good and bad by fiat ... [i]n the end, a mechanistic universe was the only one compatible with a God whose sovereignty was defined in terms of the endless freedom of fiat."[22] This control over the determination of ends, Taylor postulates, then comes to be transferred to the human level during the Enlightenment.[23] Although a mechanistic conception of the universe was partly motivated by the issue of God's sovereignty, it also enabled a new understanding of the human being's status in the world. Humans were now "masters and possessors" of the earth.[24]

"Mechanism" is the model of the universe which we usually associate with scientists such as Newton and Galileo. It conceived of the universe as governed by immutable scientific laws—the image of the clock set in motion by God is a common one here. Such an outlook was plainly antithetical to an understanding of the universe as an order of meanings. This notion was discredited as an anthropocentric projection onto a

neutral, material world. Such an objectified understanding contributed to an outlook which conceived of the world as passively subject to the human interests. Bacon made this point famous (or notorious) when he argued against science for its own sake and in favour of science whose goal was "to relieve the condition of mankind".[25] In short, mechanism permitted of understanding which enabled control in the service of (divinely inspired, on Bacon's conception) human ends.

The links between this scientific and mechanistic understanding of the world and the human beings inhabiting it, however, did not consist of issues of human control and benefit alone. Indeed, another equally fateful move was the application of this model to human beings themselves. There are several interrelated ways in which this occurred. For example, the scientific model encouraged the rejection of all "anthropocentric" or "subject-related" properties, such as colour or smell, in the construction of representations of the external world. The implications of this move for human moral self-understanding are crucial for Taylor and we will return to this in the next chapter. Here, however, the focus will be on the activity just mentioned which required this move: the construction of representations of the world.

Above, we defined the 17th century answers to questions 1) and 2) as amounting to a mechanistic understanding of human beings whose humanness consisted in their capacity for rationality. As physical creatures with physical bodies, human beings were understood to operate mechanistically, in the same manner as the universe, subject to the same laws. We find a primitive example of this approach in the opening chapters of Hobbes' *Leviathan* in which humans are portrayed as, most fundamentally, matter in motion seeking to maintain that motion. At the same time, however, humans also have rationality. We can reformulate our two questions again here and ask: How is this (i.e., rationality) to be understood? What does it consist in?

There are two ways of understanding rationality that Taylor explores: dualism and monistic mechanism.[26] The first he associates with Descartes, who is famous for his formulation of this position. While the body is to be understood mechanistically, rationality and thought are located in something metaphysical: the mind, which fundamentally exists separately from the body. What Taylor calls "monistic mechanism", he associates with Hobbes. On this view, everything is physically based.

This is the view that thinking actually occurs *in* the body, that there is no separate mind. Thus all human processes, including mental operations, depend on and are enabled by the physical working of the body itself. This second view is the one that has prevailed.

In combination with this goes the answer to the second question, the nature of rationality itself. Rational thought consisted of the framing of representations of the world in accordance with a well-defined method. This is the method Descartes outlined which has as its starting point "clear and distinct ideas".[27] By following this method and basing our claims on "évidence", we will be able to construct accurate representations of the way the world really is, and not just as some notion of a cosmic order tells us it has to be. The mechanistic view conceives of rationality in the same way, i.e., the framing of representations, only it locates the capacity in the body.

This process of framing representations, whether it occurs in the mind or the body, was in turn understood mechanistically (that is, it is not physically based, but rather operates according to a fixed and discoverable process). "Ideas", "sense impressions", "sensations", lay at the root of this process. They are the raw materials of representations obtained via the various faculties of perception. The parallels here with empiricism are clear and it is for this reason that, among other names, Taylor labels this the "Cartesian-empiricist" tradition. Central to this tradition is this mechanistic model of the thought processes of the human agent. Taken as a whole, a coherent picture of the agent emerges:

> This offers us a picture of an agent who in perceiving the world takes in "bits" of information from his or her surroundings and then "processes" them in some fashion, in order to emerge with the "picture" of the world he or she has; who then acts on the basis of this picture to fulfill his or her goals, through a "calculus" or means and ends.[28]

The old Platonic-Aristotelian view of knowing is thus discredited. It held that knowledge amounted to participating in the Idea that informed the object of our attention, and not just depicting it. With the demise of the Forms/Ideas, depiction becomes central.[29] This mental depiction comes to be understood mechanistically, as originating in "bits" of information; but the process itself also becomes central. How are we to know that these depictions are accurate? Here we fall back on Descartes' new method and the "reflexive clarity" it engenders. It is through reflection on our own processes of thought (and not some substantive cosmic order), a move that is quintessentially modern, according to

Taylor, that we generate certainty.[30] And how can we be sure this method is trustworthy, that it will yield accurate representations? Because of the existence of a veracious God, ran Descartes' argument.[31]

An underlying theme of this discussion has been the connection between the new scientific understanding of the world and the new understanding of human agency, between the scientific revolution and the epistemological revolution of the 17th century. The mechanistic understanding of the world, applied to human beings, yielded a mechanistic understanding of both the human body and its mental operations, the latter originally believed to exist separately in the mind, but eventually coming to be understood materially also (hence, as Taylor never ceases to point out, the popularity of computer models of the mind[32]). And the key feature of this new picture of the agent, outlined above, is a new theory of knowledge and human knowing activity. This model of human thinking, inspired as it was by a mechanistic understanding of the world, was instrumental to the success of the Scientific Revolution and has been to the stunning achievements of the natural sciences ever since.[33]

Taylor repeatedly emphasizes one feature of this new understanding of human knowing: its requirement of disengagement.[34] This is the feature, alluded to earlier, that requires the eschewal of all "anthropocentric", "subject-related", or "secondary" properties, such as colour. "Red" is not *in* the apple, it is a property not of the apple but of our particular way of perceiving the apple. The demand that only "disengaged" attributes be mentioned is the requirement of "absolute" description, as Bernard Williams puts it.[35] Only absolute properties, and not those relating to our particular way of seeing the world, are allowed in a theory that claims to be scientific. The need for disengagement can also be seen as the drive for objectivity.

Another feature that has emerged in the discussion above is the new procedural conception of rationality.[36] Previously, reason had been conceived of substantively. In a universe that was linked to a cosmic order, right reasoning involved having the "right" picture of things, "getting things right". For Plato, you couldn't be fully rational and not have any inkling of the Forms. With the demise of this notion of a cosmic order, claims Taylor, the only alternative was for reason to be conceived of procedurally. Reason had

to turn in on itself, so to speak, and the focus was now on the knowing activity itself.[37] In short, a new model of rationality is founded.

Problematizing the epistemological model: the ontologizing of disengagement and procedure

Up to now, we have been unpacking and describing certain features of (Taylor's reading of) the new understanding of human agency and knowing that emerges in the 17th century. Although this process of "historical articulation" is important in its own right, it actually only amounts to one stage in the position Taylor carves out for himself. So far, we have a model of human knowing as consisting of the framing of representations of an external world on the basis of a (roughly) mechanical process. That is, the framing was to follow a correct procedure based on, for example, Descartes' "clear and distinct ideas" or Locke's "rules of believable evidence".[38] In addition, it required a disengaged stance towards our own perceptions and ways of seeing the world lest purely anthropocentric elements should distort our attempt at an objective representation of how things are. As acknowledged above, this method and stance has been instrumental in the achievements of modern natural science. However, it did not remain as such, i.e., a method and stance that we could *use* or *adopt* in our efforts at understanding the world in a particular way.

What Taylor calls the "fateful" move came when this procedure and disengaged stance became *ontologized*.[39] That is, they came to be claims about how the thinking subject actually *is*. The colonization of the human being by mechanism was complete. The human being as physical being was explainable in mechanistic terms. Human thought and consciousness was then also seen as fundamentally reducible to this material and mechanistic account. And now the model of thinking these moves gave rise to was finally "read into the very constitution of the mind and made part of its very structure".[40] (This is, needless to say, a stylized account of the shifts that occurred; which is to say that these moves were closely related—a "diachronic-causal" account would show lines of causality over time going in multiple directions). As Taylor writes:

> It was one thing to call on us to break down our beliefs into their possibly separable components, another to think that the primitive information that enters the mind must do so in atomic bits. The "simple ideas" of Locke are a classical example of such a reification of procedure. [Similarly, the] disengaged perspective [was read] into the depth constitution of the mind itself, [...]

> relegating the distortions to the periphery, either as a result of error, inattention, mere lapse or as a feature only of the brute preprocessed input, not touching the procedures of processing themselves.[41]

The ontologized disengaged perspective is seen in Cartesian dualism and Hobbesian monistic mechanism. Either the distortions of embodied experience as they affect the mind's processes are eliminated, as in the former, or, common to both, the perspective is seen as essential to an accurate grasping of a mechanistic universe.[42] The quest for objectivity is foundational here.

For Taylor, there were complex motives that inspired the outcome of this "quest" which saw the dawn of a new picture of the agent, a new ontology of the human. The prestige of natural science and the role science played in building its reputation was of no small importance.[43] But of greater importance is the connection of this model with a certain conception of human dignity and freedom.[44] This connects back to the issue of control discussed earlier in relation to the origins of a mechanistic world outlook. Associated with this modern conception of freedom was a set of ideas about the human agent or, as Taylor calls them, "anthropological beliefs".[45] His description of them amounts to another (overlapping) characterization of this new ontology.

> The first is the picture of the subject as ideally disengaged, that is, as free and rational to the extent that he has fully distinguished himself from the natural and social worlds, so that his identity is no longer to be defined in terms of what lies outside him in these worlds. The second, which flows from this, is a punctual view of the self, ideally ready as free and rational to treat these worlds—and even some of the features of his own character—instrumentally, as subject to change and reorganizing in order the better to secure the welfare of himself and others. The third is the social consequence of the first two: an atomistic construal of society as constituted by, or ultimately to be explained in terms of, individual purposes.

We see here the new, more full meaning disengagement assumes once it is no longer associated simply with a style of thinking and is embedded more deeply in an understanding of human agency as a whole. The same goes for the ontologizing of procedure. The disengaged, procedurally thinking subject is able to set her own ends for herself and instrumentally work on anything, even herself, in accordance with them. She is "free and rational" and lives in a society full of such free and rational individuals.

The crucial point Taylor wants to make is that this whole ontologizing move is simply wrong. Rather, the procedural method and disengaged stance should be seen as part of a particular way of approaching the world. Taylor's argument is not that we should treat these as such and thus cultivate other, equally particular ways of approaching the world—i.e., ways we *adopt* but which are not in any way ontologically grounded. Rather, Taylor wants to show that there *is* a way of being in the world that is *inescapable*, for *all* human agents. It is encapsulated in the expression "engaged agency". On this reading, disengagement is cast as "a rare and regional *achievement* of a knowing agent whose normal stance [is] engaged".[46] In terms of the content-context distinction, these theories fail to see that the objects of their focus (the procedural method and a disengaged stance), which in turn define the content of these theories, are dependent on and enabled by different backgrounds to human agency. We will see how this is the case in the next section.

The disengaged perspective constitutes Taylor's chief target in his critique of traditional epistemology and rationalism. These two terms designate the whole understanding of knowledge and the knowing agent that we have been fleshing out in the previous pages. One pivotal argument in favour of seeing disengagement as an achievement and not as ontologically grounded is to understand its complete dependence on another, more basic, human achievement: language. Language enables a whole set of ways of relating to the world Taylor groups under the term "contemplative", e.g., "scientific theorizing, taxonomy, aesthetic admiration".[47] Taylor goes on to claim again that

> the "contemplative" ways of looking at the world, and particularly our looking at it as an ensemble of neutral objects, i.e., not as relevant to my purposes, constitute an *achievement*. It is the great error of traditional epistemology to take it as the unproblematic starting point for our knowledge of the world.[48]

But if the disengaged perspective should not be our starting point for our knowledge of the world, *what should be?*

Engaged agency and background: Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger

The answer to this question may be seen as forming the basis on which the rest of Taylor's philosophy, in all its wide-ranging concerns, is founded. One way of

approaching it is to return again to the two questions which are guiding our analysis here: 1) How are we to understand human agency? 2) What is it to be human? We can see our question of the proper starting point for knowledge as growing out of these two questions. Natural science and traditional epistemology provide us with two answers here. To the first, they reply: human beings are fundamentally mechanistic. And from this flows the model of disengaged agency. To the second, they reply: to be human is to be rational, which consists in the capacity for framing representations of the world. Taylor wants to take issue with both these answers for their mistaken emphasis on content at the expense of context—i.e., their screening out of other, more basic features of the human condition that are peculiarly contextual in nature. The first misses out on our original status as agents engaged with the world. The second blinds us to the prior importance of what Taylor calls the "significance feature".

To see agents as fundamentally engaged with the world is first to see them as directly reacting to and involved with a world in which they are situated. All attempts at representing this world are the fruit of language and reflection which must be seen as later achievements. The two (i.e., direct involvement with the world and achieved reflection) are connected, however. In fact, in real lived experience, they are inseparable.[49] The connection is one of dependence and enablement. Language, reflection, and representation depend on the whole level of direct engagement as a necessary background that both enables and confers intelligibility on them. Taylor develops this thesis of engaged agency and background chiefly by drawing on the writings of three 20th century philosophers: Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger.

To see the agent as "engaged" is to see that "the world of the agent is shaped by his or her form of life, or history, or bodily existence".[50] It involves "an understanding of the agent [...] as embedded in a culture, a form of life, a 'world' of involvements, ultimately to understand the agent as embodied".[51] This last point is explored by Merleau-Ponty, most notably in his *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Taylor's crunch of the argument is that prior to all representation and all reflection, our "primordial" way of being in the world, our primordial "mode of access" to the world is through perception as embodied creatures.[52] Our perception is not only foundational here, its structure is such that it could only be that of an embodied creature. Its "orientational structure"

includes designations such as "foreground" and "background", "up" and "down". Without this structure our "perceptual field" no longer makes sense to us, no longer serves as our "opening onto a world".

> In those rare moments where we lose orientation, we don't know where we are; and we don't know where or what things are either; we lose the thread of the world, and our perceptual field is no longer our access to the world, but rather the confused debris into which our normal grasp on things crumbles.[53]

Now there is a crucial relationship here between perception and embodiment. The sense we make of our perception is most fundamentally related to our most basic way of being in the world, i.e., bodily. Again, this is basic insofar as it is prior to our ability, for example, to reflect on and scrutinize our perceptions. It is in relation to our actions that perception acquires its structure.

> "[U]p and down are related to how one would move and act [...] the up-down directionality of my field is a feature of it which only makes sense in relation to my action. It is correlative of my capacity to hold myself and act in equilibrium. Because my field is structured in a way which only makes sense in relation to this capacity, I can say that the world as I perceive it is structured by it; or that I see the world through this capacity."[54]

According to Merleau-Ponty then, we must see perception as something that is "primordial and inescapable". It is not something we have any control over; we cannot help but do it. Things will always appear to us as "objects which can be grasped, or climbed on, or which are immovable, or which can be navigated between".[55] This is how we, as embodied agents, are able to have a world at all.

> My awareness of the world in which I am bodily placed is not something that I can switch on and off [...] because this mode of awareness reflects my being as a life-form engaged with the world, and my being this is a condition for all awareness whatever. Our more developed, fully voluntary modes of awareness arise on the foundation of this continuing inescapable consciousness of a world, just as our higher, more voluntary activities arise on the foundation of the original exchange with the world which we sustain as living beings.[56]

Here we see how Merleau-Ponty, on Taylor's reading, is trying to focus our attention on an aspect of human agency that is absent from the picture traditional epistemology paints for us—an aspect, no less, that it must depend on. It leaves us with a truer picture, one that tries to look at the human being genetically. That is, it differentiates between

different types of capacities (e.g., perception, reflection) and how they are realized. The crux of the argument is that our capacity for rationality builds on our prior embodiment.

Wittgenstein makes a similar move in his understanding of language. During the Enlightenment, "designative" theories of language were popular, as witnessed by the account of the origins of language we find in Condillac.[57] Simply put, this view understood the origins of language in its designative function, seeing words as signs attached to objects to designate them. Language had its origin in this act of associating word and object. (Such a conception of language fit well with the new scientific and epistemological model and its need for clear definitions and objectivity.[58] Hobbes' attempt to legislate the meaning of words in *Leviathan* is a good example of this.[59]) Taylor, however, paints a complex picture of the (Romantic) "expressivist" reaction to this view as it began with Herder. Language is seen here as emanating out of the act of expression, originally conceived non-linguistically. Expression is the act by which something is made manifest, e.g., our anger is manifested in our facial expression.[60] Now language is seen as growing out of this capacity for expression and opening us up to a new way of relating to the world.

> Both ontogenetically and in the history of culture, our first expressions are in public space, and are the vehicles of a quite unreflective awareness. Later we develop more refined media, in concepts and images, and become more capable of carrying out some part of our expressive activity monologically.[61]

This later development is what leads to reflective awareness which is enabled by language. But this distinction between unreflective and reflective awareness is not captured in the account of language which sees it as originating in the act of associating certain sounds with certain objects.

> To account for language by saying that we learn that the word 'a' stands for a's, the word 'b' for b's, is to explain nothing. How do we learn what 'standing for' involves, what it is to describe things, briefly, to acquire the reflective awareness of the language user? [...] [T]his kind of reflection is inseparable from language. It cannot precede our learning our first word. [...] This is because only someone capable of using language to describe is capable of picking things out as '—' or recognizing things as '—', in the strong sense. But this means language is not just a set of words which designate things; it is the vehicle of this kind of reflective awareness.[62]

On Herder's account, the capacity to use language designatively is only one aspect of the new type of consciousness of our world that language opens us to. Expression is primary here because this reflective awareness depends on language, and only in expression does language come to be. "Reflective consciousness only comes to exists in its expression."[63]

Now Wittgenstein's insights into language follow in this vein insofar as they also contribute to undermining the designativist view (and, more recently, truth-conditional theories of meaning like Donald Davidson's). The designativist view entails a belief in the "atomism of meaning". For Wittgenstein, however, a word can only have meaning against the background of all other words, against the background of the whole web of language. "The idea that the meaning of a word consists only in its relation to the object it names, a conception by its nature atomistic, comes to grief on the realization that each such relation draws on a background understanding and doesn't make sense without it."[64] The designativist view (which can be traced all the way back to Augustine) built this background understanding, which is a crucial condition of intelligibillity, into the words themselves.[65] Combining these two insights associated here with Herder and Wittgenstein, we obtain the following picture.

> [Language is] a pattern of activity, by which we express/realize a certain way of being in the world, that of reflective awareness, but a pattern which can only be deployed against a background which we can never fully dominate; and yet a background that we are never fully dominated by, because we are constantly reshaping it. Reshaping it without dominating it, or being able to oversee it, means that we never fully know what we are doing to it; we develop language without knowing fully what we are making it into.[66]

This view of language is certainly in stark contrast with the Enlightenment portrayal of language as a tool which we use in our construction of representations of the world (and with contemporary truth-conditional theories of meaning[67]). Again, as with perception, understanding language on this conception shows a richer and fuller picture of what we are as language beings in comparison with a view which sees it as a ready-made capacity just waiting to be discovered and used. The move to being language-users involves a fundamental shift in our way of relating to the world. It also enables new ways of relating to the world, as we will see below in our discussion of the "significance feature".

What emerges from this discussion of Merleau-Ponty on perception and Herder and Wittgenstein on language is the importance of *background* or *context*. It is an

intrinsic part of engaged agency. Indeed, any conception of the latter is impossible without a notion of background. Our perception of any object happens against the background of our awareness of the perceptual field itself in which the object is located. My focussing on one thing at any given moment presupposes a context for the thing itself and for my perceiving. By the same token, when I use a word, its meaning is dependent on its relationship to other words in the sentence, its relations to all other words, and so on. My words can only have meaning within the context of the whole web of language.

For Taylor, it is in Heidegger that we see the fullest description of the role of background in human agency. For Heidegger, our primodial stance is one of "being at grips with a world of independent things, prior to any attempt on our part to represent them".[68] Before our reflection, before language, we are first engaged with the world on the level of "dealing" with it, developing bodily know-how, learning to move around in the world, being involved with things, using them with understanding.[69] This is what Heidegger calls the "pre-understanding". This understanding, however, does not consist of representations—"knowing our way about" is not something we need words or representations to grasp.[70]

Thus the background(s) through which our being in the world is enabled are largely "pre-articulate". It is the context within which our engagement with the world makes sense.

> Engaged agency is that agency whose experience is made intelligible only by being placed in the context of the kind of agency it is. Thus our embodiment makes our experience of space as oriented up-down understandable. In this relation, the first term—the form of agency (e.g., embodiment)—stands to the second—our experience—as a context conferring intelligibility. When we find a certain experience intelligible, what we are attending to, explicitly and expressly, is this experience. The context stands as the unexplicited horizon within which [...] this experience can be understood.[71]

But this horizon need not remain "unexplicited". It is open to being "articulated".[72] Taylor conceives of the process as tripartite: pre-understanding—articulation—understanding.[73] Now articulation must not be confused here with description, at least on the epistemological model, for our pre-understanding does not consist of representations. Articulation should be seen more as giving shape to this background, putting its contours into relief, trying to get at how it serves to enable our being in the world. It is this

process of articulation that Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger were preoccupied with.

The articulation of backgrounds and the transcendental argument

This is by no means a simple task, for at least two important reasons. First, it must be remembered that this whole "positive" project of theorizing an engaged agency is diametrically opposed to, indeed is directed against, the model of disengaged agency and the epistemological tradition of which it forms an important part. This poses a real challenge because the latter has become an intrinsic part of Western institutions and practices as an "organizing principle". "[T]he model became embedded in our manner of doing natural science, in our technology, in some at least of the dominant ways in which we construe political life (the atomistic ones), later in various of our ways of healing, regimenting, organizing people in society."[74] In one sense, these developments find their origins in the Scientific Revolution and the mechanistic world outlook discussed earlier. Just as the physical world is understood by assuming a disengaged stance and following a certain rational procedure, so our social relations and practices come to fall under the sway of this approach and are "progressively objectified". Another important feature of this approach is instrumental reason, "a mode of evaluation [which] is endemic to the institutions of a modern industrial economy, that is, the activities which define these institutions relate them to an external purpose, e.g., profit, efficient production, or growth".[75] Trying to work out an alternative to disengaged agency and traditional epistemology thus requires the extraction of this perspective as it is embodied in our current institutions and practices in order that we may see more clearly how we are caught up in it. Tracing the origins of the epistemological construal to Descartes, Taylor asks, "How does a model like the epistemological one move from being an exciting conquest [...] to being too obvious for words?"[76] The process of retrieval is thus essential here.

A second important reason for the difficulty of the task of articulation lies in the nature of the object being articulated. Backgrounds, contexts, are, quite simply, not usually the object of our attention. The whole issue of backgrounds doesn't even arise for modern epistemology. For example, we saw earlier how in its associated theory of

language, the necessary background understanding was built into the words themselves. More generally, "simple ideas" are seen as bits of information which, once perceived, carry with them immediate understanding of what they are about, what they represent, what they signify. The focus in traditional epistemology is on the experience itself. It "completely misses the irreducible content-context structure of engaged agency".[77] The latter therefore also sees the human being as attending primarily to experience, to that which s/he is focussing on. But it also understands the enabling role background plays in that experience/focussing.

By its very nature, however, this background is difficult to grasp. "[W]e cannot properly alter the focus and make it focal."[78] We are investigating an area of human agency that we do not normally preoccupy ourselves with. A useful metaphor might be to see it as the foundation or frame of a house. We do not usually examine these carefully to see how they hold up the house; we spend most of our time living in the house, moving about it, doing things in it. But when we do succeed in articulating some of this background correctly, we are able to recognize it as such, as something I "always knew", had a "sense" of, even if I didn't "know" it.[79] Nevertheless, the process of articulation itself is not an easy one.

> For although a correct formulation will be self-evidently valid, the question may arise whether we have formulated things correctly. This is all the more so since we are moving into an area that the ordinary practice of life has left unarticulated, an area we look through rather than at. It is an area where there are no formulations available in ordinary speech, and where it is hard to make things clear. Our language has to be inventive to do so. [...] We have to innovate in language, and bring the limits of experience to clarity in formulations that open up a zone normally outside our range of thought and attention.[80]

In talking about things such as the "up-down orientation" of our "perceptual field", "language-games", "pre-understanding", etc. Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger engaged in just this sort of linguistic invention.

Given the primacy of background in human agency, Taylor accords the task of its articulation an importance greater than all others. For this background is the necessary context in which the representations, to which the epistemological tradition gives primacy, obtain their sense. Given their nature, however, they can't be fully articulated. "Because it isn't a matter of representations, but of a real context conferring sense. [...]

[C]omplete articulacy is a chimera [because] any articulation itself needs the background to succeed."[81] Here the house analogy fails because it implies that there is one object of articulation (i.e., the frame/foundation); but the activity of articulation is, in truth, endless. Once it is further understood that this background is rooted in our bodily know-how, our "practices", and not in some sort of fully developed but underlying mechanism amenable to representation (e.g., the computer program model), the prospect of full articulacy is seen for the illusion it is and this very goal itself as inspired by the epistemological model. Taylor provides a catchy image for conceiving of the relationship between representations and background. "Rather than representations being the primary locus of understanding, they are just islands in the sea of our unformulated practical grasp on the world."[82]

The articulation of the background(s) is of such importance because, in a word, it replaces the quest of foundationalism. We must abandon the search so central to modern epistemology for the metaphysical foundations of knowledge.[83] To be sure, Taylor notes, this was the proposal Quine made in his "Epistemology Naturalized".[84] But as should be clear from the foregoing discussion, "overcoming epistemology" does not consist only in the abandonment of the search for metaphysical foundations. Rather it amounts to "overcoming the distorted anthropological beliefs [i.e., disengagement, atomism, the punctual, instrumentally thinking self] through a critique and correction of the construal of knowledge that is interwoven with them and has done so much to give them undeserved credit."[85] And part of this process of "critique and correction" involves the articulation of the background to our ways of being in the world. This articulation becomes part of a revised "modern project of reason". Reason now must include "alongside the familiar forms of the Enlightenment—a new department, whose excellence consists in our being able to articulate the background of our lives perspicuously."[86]

So it is this notion of background that becomes the starting point for our knowledge of the world, in response to the question we posed a few pages back about what this starting point should be. The fuller understanding of human agency that it provides should now be a little clearer. Nevertheless, the spectre of foundationalism still haunts this project. In one sense, this is entirely appropriate. For the question, "but how

is this articulation *grounded*, how can one know it is the 'right' one?" is a valid one. Here Taylor has a well-developed response.

There is a form of argument that Taylor believes has been in use at least since Kant. It is called the "transcendental argument". Basically, the procedure is to move from experience to its conditions of possibility.[87] And it is the analysis of the latter that leads us into the domain of the background. The goal here is to uncover what must be the case for some feature of our experience to be at all possible. To take a trivial example, the perception of colour and the ability to even speak of colours is only possible because there is more than one colour; contrast is essential. And then we can say what a particular colour is like only because we know how it contrasts with all the others. Something similar exists in Kant's use of the transcendental form of argument when he demonstrated why Hume's atomistic construal of knowledge was untenable. Kant argues that the conditions of the possibility of knowledge rest in the activity of the mind, not its passive 'reception' of experience. He argues further that our "representations" of these experiences must be interrelated in some way (i.e., they must form a background) for us to be able to make sense of what we experience.[88] Otherwise, we would not be able to make any sense at all of anything and our perceptions "would not then belong to any experience, consequently would be without an object, merely the blind play of representation, less even than a dream."[89] Similarly, Merleau-Ponty shows us that without what seems to us to be "undeniable essential features of experience", such as the "up-down structure" of our perceptual field, perception as we know it could not exist.[90]

The word "seems" here is important. For transcendental arguments do not show us how we "are". They don't decide questions of ontology. In the case of Merleau-Ponty, his arguments show us rather that "we are inescapably to ourselves embodied subjects."[91] Thus they cannot *prove*, for example, that the mechanistic account of human agency is impossible. But it does show that our sense of ourselves as embodied subjects must be part of any account of human agency that "invokes our own self-understanding."[92] This point is in many ways a key one for Taylor's approach to human agency. Not only does the epistemological construal of human agency miss out on the importance of background. It is also oblivious to the importance of self-understanding. This takes us back to our discussion of the claims of value-free theory. What we

understand ourselves to be can inform how we act and think, or, turning it around, how we act and think depends partly on our self-understanding. The relationship between theory or articulation and self-understanding, however, is not a simple one. Some theories, such as the Freudian one, can alter our self-understanding. But at another level, there is an understanding an agent has of his/her actions that is prior to reflection and theory. This the realm of Heideggerian pre-understanding.

It is also the realm of what Taylor calls "agent's knowledge".[93] Understanding does not consist only of theoretical, representational, linguistic knowledge. Our philosophical definition of this term must be enlarged to include things such as "bodily know-how", "knowing our way about", "knowing how to use things", etc. Agent's knowledge involves articulating the largely inarticulate understanding we have of this realm, this background. Taylor fleshes out this point in an analysis of the nature of action.

> [T]here is a knowledge we are capable of concerning our own action which we can attain as the doers of this action. [...] Action is distinct in that it is directed, aimed to encompass ends or purposes. And this notion of directedness is part of our conception of agency: the agent is the being responsible for the direction of action, the being for whom and through whom action is directed as it is. [...] As agents, we will already have some sense, however dim, inarticulate or subliminal, of what we are doing; otherwise, we could not speak of directing at all. So agent's knowledge is a matter of bringing this sense to formulation, articulation or full consciousness.[94]

It is in agent's knowledge that transcendental arguments, as Taylor conceives them, are grounded. Or, more accurately, they are grounded in experience and their *validity* is grounded in agent's knowledge. Taylor alternatively defines the latter as the implicit sense we have of the necessary conditions of coherent action,[95] which are revealed in our ability to recognize the "conditions of failure" in this regard. For example, "if I couldn't recognize that, when all broke down into confusion, awareness had failed, then you couldn't think of me as aware in the first place. We aren't aware at all unless we can recognize this difference."[96] The sense of these conditions flows from the insight we have into our own action, into the "point of [our] activity", an insight which is not total but some degree of which is necessary for us to be able to engage in the activity at hand.[97]

We thus have a procedure, transcendental argumentation, which is rooted in a substantive source, experience and agent's knowledge. Together they guide us in our articulation of the background of our lives. Keeping in mind the role agent's knowledge plays, we can now present Taylor's schematization of the method a transcendental argument follows:

> First, they consist of a string of what one could call indispensability claims. They move from their starting points to their conclusions by showing that the condition stated in the conclusion is indispensable to the feature identified at the start. [E.g., starting point: coherent experience; conclusion: application of categories] [...]
> The second point is that these indispensability claims are not meant to be empirically grounded, but a priori. They are not merely probable, but apodictic, [...] self-evident. [...]
> The third point is that these claims concern experience. This gives the chain an anchor without which it wouldn't have the significance it does.[98]

Even the starting point is an "indispensability claim" itself, but at each level of the argument what makes the claims self-evident is a combination of agent's knowledge and explanation aimed at showing why they are "indispensable", which in turn ultimately draws on agent's knowledge. Thus the starting point of, e.g., coherent experience, may not require much explanation for it to be self-evident, for once someone describes what it involves, we can recognize immediately our own experience of it. The end point however, in this case the applicability of categories, will however require explanation since it is simply not obvious to the average person that they are implicitly applying (Kant's) categories whenever they experience anything. It is hard to see what is going on here because this more basic level of understanding about what is going on is not something we normally think about.[99]

The final point which needs to be made about this whole process is its revisability. Kant's categories, for example, are by no means universally accepted. Because transcendental arguments take us into an area that is normally not the object of our attention and for which we do not have ready-made formulations or even words, as we saw above, they can distort. They are thus always open to reformulation and "endless debate."[100] Backgrounds indubitably do exist, but their articulations must always be revisable.

A new approach to the study of human agency: hermeneutics, phenomenology, and inescapable structures

The route of engaged agency and background is thus the more accurate way of answering the question, "How are we to understand human agency?" More accurate, that is, than the route of disengaged agency and mechanism proposed by traditional epistemology, for it highlights the constitutive role context plays in enabling our consciousness and knowledge. This leaves us with the second question, "What is it to be human?" The short answer to this question, according to Taylor, is not "to possess rationality", but rather, a certain form of the "significance feature" which he defines as that feature of an agent whereby things have significance for its purposes, interests, goals.[101] Again, this feature, like the notion of background, exists prior to our achieved ability to frame representations of an external world. Indeed, it would be more appropriate to see the latter as growing out of the significance feature.

First and foremost, this feature involves the recognition that "things matter to us".[102] As agents, along with animals, things that happen around us, to us, things in general have a significance for our purposes, goals, and needs that they do not for non-agents. Our actions themselves are constituted by their purposes. And to unpack this purpose is to show, most basically, what matters to us, what we are trying to accomplish, etc. It is this feature that marks off agents from non-agents.

Language fundamentally alters things. It opens up the possibility of a new way of being in the world, that of reflective awareness (*Besonnenheit* on Herder's account).[103]

> If language serves to express/realize a new kind of awareness; then it may not only make possible a new awareness of things, an ability to describe them; but also new ways of feeling, of responding to things. If in expressing our thoughts about things, we can come to have new thoughts; then in expressing our feelings, we can come to have transformed feelings. [...] In being able to express our feelings, we give them a reflective dimension which transforms them. The language user can feel not only anger but indignation, not only love but admiration.[104]

The significance feature hinges on the sense/feeling that something is significant or important to us. It need therefore not be articulated. But with language, we now have the ability to pick out these related senses/feelings and name them, refine them, *modify* them. Our emotional world is also crucially linked to language. For Taylor, human emotion is

fundamentally *interpreted* emotion. Certain emotions, such as shame, pride, humiliation, etc. are available only to language-users. Language is our mode of access to these emotions, it enables them. More generally, human beings may be seen as partly constituted by their own self-interpretations.[105] We will return to these claims in chapter two where we will examine the quintessentially human activity that grows out of the significance feature, "strong evaluation".

This activity requires restoring the importance of a human-centred perspective on things and rejecting the scientific model's need for the eschewal of anthropocentric/subjective properties. In a way, this is only to be expected, for Taylor's "methodology" hinges on the importance of actual, lived experience. Taylor never actually sets out what his methodology is, but its basic elements become apparent after a perusal of his most important writings. He can be said to follow a method which is both hermeneutical and phenomenological. Taking the hermeneutical first, we have seen the importance Taylor accords to the notion of background. At the same time, he accords equal importance to the centrality of interpretation in human life. Hence the names of some of his seminal articles: "Interpretation and the sciences of man" and "Self-interpreting animals".[106] The way we see ourselves, our self-understandings, are intimately connected with the interpretations we both make and have made for us of all aspects of our lives. For example, to see myself as a being who has basic desires for love, sex, food, etc. is not something innate. It is itself a particular way of understanding what I am.

At the same time, so much of how we act and think derives from an inarticulate sense of what is right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate, effective or ineffective. Even our interpretations can be pre-articulate in this sense. This was the important point we made in relation to the notion of backgrounds. We do not have a conscious, formulated understanding of everything we are or of everything that enables us to be what we are. This is where a phenomenological approach comes in. By examining what we can see, we can get insight into what we can't. For Taylor, this involves examining how human beings actually live their lives, how they go about making sense of their lives. The primacy of real, lived experience and the resistance to reductivism are crucial elements here. Reductivism seeks to explain human life in terms that may not figure in

the explanations actual people would themselves give of their actions and experiences. For example, naturalism, as we will see in the next chapter, wants to understand human morality in scientific terms. Taylor's approach, however, takes seriously the actual experiences and explanations of everyday life and builds a theoretical understanding on this. One way of disproving, for example, an atomistic construal of political society is to show that this is simply not how human beings see themselves or, what is more, become 'selves'. Human beings can only become individuals within the context of a community of some sort. Human beings do not see themselves as radically separate from all other people in society. We will return to atomism in chapter four.

One of Taylor's chief goals, which this hermeneutical-phenomenological method assists him in, is the uncovering of the "inescapable structures of human agency".[107] The "significance feature" is such a structure:

> It is not just that the significance feature seems to be an essential part of any plausible explanation for much of what we do and feel. It is also that we cannot choose to abandon this way of looking at ourselves. For it is inescapably involved in our functioning as human beings. The significance feature is at the center of human life, because we come to understandings with people about the significance of things. [...] In the most important cases, of course, one of the things whose significance is understood between us is our relationship itself. [...] The significance feature is constitutive of our understanding of *ourselves* in ordinary life, as this must be if we are to function normally as human beings.[108]

What Taylor is looking for here are those structures that all cultures must address or incorporate, that are universally applicable.[109] The notion of background is another such structure. Human agency as we know it, as any human being lives it, would simply not be possible without the content-context distinction. We saw how perception and language depend on this in order for their existence to be possible at all.

In the next chapter we will see how Taylor articulates the structures of human moral experience, employing the hermeneutical-phenomenological method outlined here. Seeing this methodology in action is a far better way of understanding how it works and its effectiveness than any definition can permit. What is clear from this discussion of it, however, is Taylor's confidence that there *are* structures to be articulated, that this project of articulation *does* have an object and that its results *can* be judged as to their validity.

Overcoming epistemology and the return to realism

This confidence is in many ways the heart of Taylor's philosophy. It is borne of his commitment to realism. Not surprisingly, this is related to his critique of epistemology. To truly overcome epistemology, we must abandon not only the foundationalist quest, but also its whole representative construal of knowledge along with the anthropological beliefs (e.g., disengaged agency) that are tied to it. This is the feat that thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger have helped us to accomplish.[110] This is also why, according to Taylor, Richard Rorty has not fully escaped the epistemological tradition. His non-realism rests on the old epistemological construal of knowledge insofar as it holds that if we can have no absolute (metaphysical) foundations for our knowledge claims, then an anti-realism pragmatism is the only way to go.[111] But there is no reason why this ex ante theory of knowledge and understanding should not also be discarded. Indeed, the critiques of epistemology insist that it must be.

> It is crucial to these contemporary rejections of epistemology that they no longer see our entire understanding of things as consisting of representations. The framework understanding [...] which Heidegger sometimes calls 'pre-understanding', is not itself a representation of our position in the world. It is that against the background of which I frame all my representations, and that in virtue of which I know that these are true or false because of the way things are. It has been a persistent vice of the epistemological tradition to try to assimilate this pre-understanding to the representations it frames, as though it could be exhaustively accounted for in terms of *information about* the subject and his world.
>
> Once you accept some view of this kind, with its [Heideggerian] conception of framed representations [that is, all representations are framed against the background of pre-understanding], there is no further problem with the propositions that the reality independent of my representations makes them true or false. And there is no temptation whatever to construe this as an invocation of things-in-themselves. It is only if one remains in the old epistemology, where representations constitute our entire understanding, and are as it were our only route to contact with the 'outside world', that this kind of talk takes on a transcendent metaphysical flavour. This is the sense of my claim [...] that really burying epistemology leads you back to realism.[112]

Thus we have a particular conception of human agency endorsed by traditional epistemology and the mechanistic view of the universe. Through an appreciation of the engaged nature of human agency and the role of background we come to see just how wrong this conception is. At the same time, we also have a new way of conceiving what "knowing" really is. It is not about representations. It is about our *practices*. It is about

being in the world. And it is on the basis of this new conception of knowing that we are led to realism. Taylor's theory of human agency and his methodology, both of which are elements of his 'philosophical anthropology', are founded on this belief in realism, a realism shorn of both the illusion and spectre of foundationalism.

II: NATURALISM AND MORAL PHENOMENOLOGY

The commitment to realism is nowhere seen more clearly than in Taylor's writings on morality. Taylor's moral realism, however, amounts to far more than a hostile stance towards moral relativism. It is about more than a philosophical analysis of moral theory whose goal is a rational proof of moral realism. In fact, it is decidedly *not* this. Given the approach to human agency outlined in the previous chapter, this should not come as a surprise.

There we encountered Taylor's critique of traditional epistemology and its model of disengaged agency. Perhaps the most serious shortcoming of that model, according to Taylor, is the absence of any conception of "background". Human knowledge cannot simply be equated with the (rational) representations of the world, of themselves, and of others that human beings mentally formulate. Being human, or the "distinctively human", does not only consist in the capacity for rationality, as conceived by traditional epistemology. Representations and the particular conception of rationality that generates them are not originally fundamental to human agency. They are *achieved* capacities. But to say they are "achieved" is to imply that there is something that exists prior to them, on which they are built.

This is where the notion of background enters front and centre. A more accurate reading of human agency contextualizes the capacity for rational representation. It sees it as growing out of a complex background understanding that human agents have of their world in virtue of being just that: embodied human agents. Acting in the world, bodily know-how, dealing with things, *practices*—the realm of Heideggerian pre-understanding—this is what is primary. Humans are primordially *engaged* with the world and rational reflection builds on this engagement. A truer picture of human agency emerges when looked at from this broader perspective.

And this is precisely what Taylor does in his study of morality and moral agency. So much of contemporary moral and political theory has been influenced by traditional epistemology. The weakness that is central to these theories for Taylor defines a core issue in contemporary moral and political theory that is considered by many to be pressing. Briefly put: "Can we plausibly separate the 'ethical' from the 'moral'?" The

ethical is understood to encompass conceptions of the good while the moral is restricted to conceptions of what is right. The right refers to how we treat other people, most notably, in respecting their rights and freedoms. "Right" has connotations of "correct", "just", "fair". The good, by contrast, refers to whatever gives meaning to our lives, makes them fulfilling and worth living. For example, love relationships, the capacity for artistic expression, or financial success are all potential goods in our lives. These goods are often seen as culturally relative, different cultures endorsing different goods, while what is morally right is seen as universally valid.

Is the separation between the two a meaningful one? For example, can an understanding of what is right in the West, say in terms of human rights (insofar as these can claim to be universal), simply be imposed on another part of the world and justified as binding because it is has been defined independently of the ethical (insofar as this is culturally relative)? What are the grounds on which such a separation can be made? The proceduralism that Taylor believes defines our theoretical understanding of morality and politics is the best example of this separation. Here human morality is reduced to the field of right action and its rational determinants. Moral theory concerns itself with these determinants, or "basic reasons,"[1] as Taylor calls them, such as the utilitarian principle of pursuing the greatest good for the greatest number or some version of a universalization principle. Such theory, Taylor claims, misses out on too much. It fails to come to terms with, or at least openly consider, what Taylor maintains is the full complexity of human moral experience. A philosophical analysis of mainstream moral theory as it stands and *on its own terms* is thus problematic for Taylor, at least to begin with. The field of debate that is possible within its terms is too narrow and needs to be broadened.

What is needed, rather, is a concerted effort at articulating those aspects and areas of moral experience that, Taylor argues, have been left untouched by such narrow moral theories. It is this that is in fact the heart of Taylor's moral realism. It involves examining human moral experience against that broader background outlined above, i.e, investigating the complexities of contextualized experience, and developing a picture of moral agency that is richer and more accurate than the one we are presented with by most contemporary moral theories. In the present chapter then, we will look at Taylor's efforts

to flesh out this richer picture of moral agency largely in opposition to the attempts on the part of naturalism to radically simplify it, and in chapters three and four, at the critique of proceduralism in moral and political theory that builds on this picture.

Selves and strong evaluation

An examination of Taylor's moral philosophy allows us to give some real content to what has otherwise been a rather abstract discussion about *approaches* to human agency. The connections, however, are intimate. For the present discussion of morality is best seen as an *application* of the ideas elaborated in chapter one. Indeed, the hermeneutical-phenomenological method outlined at the end of the last chapter will be put into direct use here. The role of both interpretation and actual, lived experience this method points to is central to the richer picture of morality Taylor wants to portray. And one of the chief goals of this inquiry is to delineate the inescapable structures of human agency.

A good place to start is with a structure that is not a structure: the self. Taylor wants to argue that the *sense* of self is something to be found in some form in all cultures. Reflexivity, such as we find in reflexive pronouns for instance, is universal. But the notion of *the* self, that we have "selves", is not. Rather, it is a peculiarly modern phenomenon involving what Taylor calls "radical reflexivity", that is, the move from reflexive concerns about one's health for example to the examination of one's own experience or thinking.[2]

Not surprisingly, this move to seeing the human person as "the self" was in part aided by the 17th century model of disengagement discussed in chapter one. "Each of us is called upon to become a responsible, thinking mind, self-reliant for his or her judgments."[3] Rather than remaining an ideal, this comes to be read as part of our constitution as human beings. We become objects to ourselves. We can be worked on, modified, improved. As reminiscent as this may sound of ancient ideals of self-fashioning, what is new here is the way in which we objectify both ourselves and our thought. In ancient times, self-fashioning involved a reflexive attitude in which the individual engaged with his or her actual experiences and feelings. But the modern

version amounts to a "reification of the disengaged first-person-singular self", found in the writings of Descartes and Locke.[4] The subject is a "center of monological consciousness" containing inner representations of the world around it. No consideration of the constitutive relationship to body or other is entertained.[5]

Now Taylor wants to maintain that this sense of what it is to be "selves" or to have "selves" is particular to the modern West. It should not be construed as universally valid for not only is it confronted with different senses of self from other cultures, but it also faces challenge from within the Western tradition. Indeed, Taylor is a major source of one such challenge. Rather, this modern Western sense of self should be seen as one interpretation among many possible such interpretations. "I believe that what we are as human agents is profoundly interpretation-dependent, that human beings in different cultures can be radically diverse, in keeping with their fundamentally different self-understandings."[6] But, at the same time as being sensitive to the extent to which culture and community shape who we are and what we become Taylor refuses to see this as entirely interpretation-dependent. "But I think that a constant is to be found in the shape of the questions that all cultures must address."[7] There is something basic and universal here that is being worked on.

> Naturally, it is at best centuries premature to proffer anything like a structured theory of ... what belongs to human agency as such, in all times, and places, and what is shaped differently in different cultures. But it is also undeniable that we inescapably make hazy, provisional assumptions about those timeless features of human agency that hold across cultures whenever we try to define the historically specific sense of self of a given age, like our own.[8]

Uncovering some of these "timeless features" or "constants" is thus the key task involved in working towards a richer picture of human moral experience than the one offered by traditional epistemology and the contemporary moral theories growing out of it.

The most important such constant for Taylor's moral philosophy is what he calls "strong evaluation".[9] A convenient way of getting at what this entails is to contrast it with its opposite, "weak evaluation". The latter involves decisions about issues that are trivial or unimportant yet which are made every minute of the day. Examples of weak evaluation would be choosing between vanilla or strawberry ice cream, deciding which side of the street to walk on, whether to swim before or after lunch, and so on. Strong

evaluations involve issues of importance, and importance here may be translated as "worth".

> But what is missing in the above cases [of weak evaluation] is a qualitative evaluation of my desires; the kind of thing we have, for instance, when I refrain from acting on a given motive—say, spite, or envy—because I consider it base or unworthy. In this kind of case our desires are classified in such categories as higher or lower, virtuous and vicious, more and less fulfilling, more and less refined, profound and superficial, noble and base. They are judged as belonging to qualitatively different modes of life: fragmented or integrated, alienated or free, saintly, or merely human, courageous or pusillanimous and so on.[10]

Here we have at least three points being made about what strong evaluation involves. First, strong evaluation is about qualitative evaluation. Second, it involves some form of classifying or categorizing. And third, it points to different modes of life. One colourful example Taylor provides is of a professor who finds out that his colleague down the hall has just won the Nobel Prize. His initial reaction is to burst into tears, to smash the furniture, to call Stockholm and ask them why they don't recognize genuine talent, etc. But at the same time, he *despises* himself for reacting this way. He feels it is "vile, low, utterly self-absorbed, quite petty, etc. etc.". It is this second reaction that is the strong evaluation. (Taylor gives credit here to Harry Frankfurt who would characterize this reaction as a "second-order" valuation.[11]) The professor is strongly evaluating his reaction of despair *negatively*—such a reaction is part of a "mode of life" that he doesn't consider admirable. He doesn't want to be the sort of person who would react this way.[12]

The case for strong evaluation: lived experience vs. naturalism

Among the slightly varied descriptions Taylor gives of strong evaluation in the articles and books where he raises it, he most commonly defines it as the qualitative evaluation of desires according to worth.[13] Trying to unpack this definition should prove elucidating. First, what seems to be most basic is the act of *evaluation* or *valuation*. Much of Taylor's moral writings are taken up with the defence of this activity against the naturalists (esp. behaviourists and sociobiologists) who want to portray it as illusory, as a projection onto a fundamentally neutral physical world. There are several reasons for this, but the most important among them is the sway of the natural science model and its

associated eschewal of "subjective" or "anthropocentric" properties, mentioned in chapter one. The rapid progress of the natural sciences during and after the Scientific Revolution was due in part to the call for what Bernard Williams has called "absolute" description.[14] That is, to grasp truth, one had to eliminate the distorting effect of subjective experience; one's descriptions had to be 'de-personalized', made 'objective'. For example, the pain we feel from a tooth-ache is not in the tooth on this view, however much our experience of the pain points to this. It is, rather, according to the theory, a sensation we experience in our minds. Or the "redness" we see is not in the apple itself, but is rather our particular way of processing the light waves it reflects.[15] Absolute description requires that we disengage from our subjective experience of the world and base our claims on evidence and principles that can be objectively agreed upon. The object here is an understanding of the world as it is independent of any individual's personal experience of it.

Now our use of terms like good, bad, joyous, proud, admirable, melancholy, and so on—our "language of evaluative distinctions" or our "vocabulary of worth"[16]—are seen by naturalists in the same light. Such value-terms simply have no objective existence. They are, in 'absolute' terms, an illusory projection that cannot figure in an accurate account of the world; or, on a more sophisticated variant of naturalism, they are an unavoidable feature of human agency, but one which still must be brought under rational control.[17] The basic argument in favour of this attitude is that the use of such language clouds our understanding of what we really are as human beings. Talk of values and goods all smack of the metaphysical. Now on the second variant, these terms might be admitted on the basis of a utilitarian and functional reading we give to them. For example, instead of maintaining that you want to lose weight because you want to be someone others admire for your self-control, or just for aesthetic reasons, you should realize that the real reason you want to lose weight is because obesity prevents the enjoyment of other goods such as good health.[18] It is purely a matter of calculating the best course of action in order to obtain the most happiness. But even if we grant this allowance by the sophisticated variant, this use of value terms is very much constrained and out of sync with how people actually use them.

This last point forms the basis on which Taylor builds his critique of naturalism and his own theory of moral agency: the importance of real, lived experience. The object of Taylor's critique here is actually broader than just naturalism. He describes this part of his project in the following way.

> I wanted to argue against the understanding of human life and action implicit in an influential family of theories in the sciences of man. The common feature of this family is the ambition to model the study of man on the natural sciences. Theories of this kind seem to me to be terribly implausible. They lead to very bad science: either they end up in wordy elaborations of the obvious, or they fail altogether to address the interesting questions, or their practitioners end up squandering their talents and ingenuity in the attempt to show that they can after all recapture the insights of ordinary life in their manifestly reductive explanatory languages.[19]

Among the many problems Taylor identifies with this "family of theories", the most important for our purposes (and arguably in general) is the refusal or inability of these theories to take real, lived human experience seriously. It is here that we encounter Taylor's most convincing defence of a phenomenological approach to human agency. One feature of actual human experience is this activity of valuation. And because of the hold of the natural science model, this activity is either exposed for the sham it is or re-interpreted in such a fashion as to lose its real meaning and importance in our lives.

Underlying this is the motive of the quest for scientific certainty. Human beings are as much subject to the laws of physics and chemistry as a rock is. So why shouldn't we ultimately be able to explain human behaviour mechanistically, e.g., in neurophysiological terms? Taylor agrees with this hypothesis and does not want to deny the possibility of a scientific understanding of human beings. However, he simply does not believe that a scientific understanding can explain *all* of human behaviour, or, leaving the door open, at least not yet.[20] His arguments here, again, are varied and complex, spanning many articles.

In an article on contemporary Anglo-American psychology, however, Taylor provides us with a convenient scheme for understanding the gist of his argument. There he differentiates between what he believes are three separate, but overlapping, domains of study in psychology. The first is that of the "psycho-physical" which studies the "correlations between physically defined dimensions and certain psychic states or

capacities which are unambiguously present or absent, for example between a certain state of body chemistry and feeling hungry".[21] Here the classical model of science is appropriate. The second domain moves beyond this infrastructure to our "competences". Language (Chomsky) and child development (Piaget) are examples here. The third domain is that of "performance" or "actual motivated behaviour, particular exercises of competence toward a given end. What is involved here is the explanation of action and feeling, what we do and the emotions we experience".[22] Now here the classical (or natural science) model is simply the wrong one. It cannot fully capture and explain its object, either on its own terms or in a way that is sensible and useful to ordinary human beings. A prime example of a failed attempt at this is behaviourism, especially B.F. Skinner's brand. Taylor wants to advocate the use of the hermeneutical (and phenomenological) model in this domain (and a combination of the natural science and hermeneutical model in the domain of competences) which will take as basic the usage of terms such as goal, purpose, or action.[23] What this rejection of reductivism amounts to then is a defence of some version of "levels of analysis" that, while acknowledging the overlapping and interconnected nature of these levels, nevertheless recognizes the need for different languages to understand these different levels. This is a point Taylor articulates succinctly:

> The point about science is to strive for the degree of certainty of which the domain under study is capable, not to apply an inappropriate model just because such a model would give more satisfactory results *if* it applied.[24]

These then are the broad outlines of Taylor's critique of the natural science model as it is applied to the study of human agency. But this is only half the story. In fact it is probably not even that, for Taylor's critique only makes sense in the context of his articulation of his own positive theory of human agency, of which his theory of moral agency forms an intrinsic part. Strong evaluation was introduced above as forming the heart of this latter theory. A consideration of the activity of valuation led us into an examination of the arguments against the primacy Taylor wants to accord it. Those arguments having been considered, we must now turn our attention more squarely to Taylor's own defence of this activity and, in particular, to the basis on which he builds

that defence: real, lived experience. This will in turn clarify his critique of the use of the natural science model in the human sciences.

Taylor's focus on lived experience, on actual moral experience, grows out of his rejection of traditional epistemology. One version of this rejection leads in the direction of Rorty's pragmatism where, because of the impossibility of establishing foundations for, in this case, one's moral beliefs, one must embrace a position of moral relativism/subjectivism. But Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein, Taylor claims, have shown us how wrong the picture traditional epistemology depicts really is. And this they do in large part by articulating parts of the background of human action and thought that traditional epistemology overlooks. Intrinsic to this process of articulation is the doubting of what epistemology tells us about human action and thought and the return to actual, lived experience and the features of this which cannot be accounted for on the epistemological model. While Merleau-Ponty pursued this line of inquiry in the realm of perception and Wittgenstein in language, Taylor pursues it most assiduously in the realm of morality where strong evaluation is seen to be one such feature of lived experience not accountable for on the epistemological model. Taylor wants to claim that although such values do not enter the scope of natural science, this does not imply that they are any less real.

Strong evaluation and the value-terms it makes use of are an obvious part of lived moral experience. They are to be found in every culture.[25] And they are essential to lived moral experience because they are what make the best sense of our lives. The process of evaluating our desires according to their worth or goodness and the value-terms used in this process (e.g., admirable, contemptible, noble, generous, greedy, etc.) are what enable meaning in our lives. Without them this would simply be impossible.

> What better measure of reality do we have in human affairs than those terms which on critical reflection and after correction of the errors we can detect make the best sense of our lives? 'Making the best sense' here includes not only offering the best, most realistic orientation about the good but also allowing us best to understand and make sense of the actions and feelings of ourselves and others.[26]

Taylor mentions terms such as "dignity", "courage", or "brutality" and claims that without them effective practical deliberation would not be possible.[27] They are

irreducible and for this reason indispensable to the "best account" we can give of our lives and action. Taylor encapsulates this argument here in what he calls the "BA principle" (i.e., best account principle).[28]

Again, just because these terms might not fit into a scientific explanation of human behaviour in no way undermines their importance in the "non-explanatory contexts of living", i.e., in lived experience.

> We cannot just leap outside of these terms altogether, on the grounds that their logic doesn't fit some model of "science" and that we know a priori that human beings must be explicable in this "science". This begs the question. How can we ever know that humans can be explained by any scientific theory *until* we actually explain how they live their lives in its terms?

What is important here is to note how for Taylor a rejection of this scientific reductivism entails a form of moral realism, but one shorn of the appeal to metaphysical foundations.

> Of course, the terms of our best account will never figure in a physical theory of the universe. But that just means that our human reality cannot be understood in the terms appropriate for this physics. This is the complement to the anti-Aristotelian purge of natural science in the seventeenth century. Just as physical science is no longer anthropocentric, so human science can no longer be couched in the terms of physics. Our value terms purport to give us insight into what it is to live in the universe as a human being, and this is a quite different matter from that which physical science claims to reveal and explain. This reality is, of course, dependent on us, in the sense that a condition for its existence is our existence. But once granted that we exist, it is no more a subjective projection than what physics deals with.[29]

Once we truly overcome the influence the scientific model has over us in our study of the human sciences and allow for a broader conception of what constitutes knowledge, we will then be in a position to do justice to real, lived moral experience. "What is real is what you have to deal with, what won't go away just because it doesn't fit with your prejudices."[30] This is the insight Taylor brings to his study of morality, transforming it into a theory of *moral phenomenology*.

Moral space

The parallel here with Merleau-Ponty, who was a major early influence on Taylor's ideas, is not far-fetched.[31] In his study of the phenomenology of perception,

Merleau-Ponty showed us how our embodiment shapes the way we orient ourselves in physical space and how we perceive objects in it. Similarly, in his study of moral phenomenology, Taylor is trying to uncover the conditions of that moral experience, the structures that enable it. The naturalist may yet ask: "Why do I have to accept what emerges from this phenomenological account?" Taylor is ready with a reply.

> The answer is that this is not only a phenomenological account but an exploration of the limits of the conceivable in human life, an account of its "transcendental conditions". It may be wrong in detail, of course; and the challenge is always there to provide a better one. [...] For the aim of this account is to examine how we actually make sense of our lives, and to draw the limits of the conceivable from our knowledge of what we actually do when we do so.[32]

We will recall from chapter one that transcendental arguments obtain their authority in part from their being anchored in experience. And in the moral domain, Taylor's position can be stated quite simply: experience over epistemology.

We have already seen how our moral experiences point to the inescapable activity of strong evaluation. Drawing out the analogy with Merleau-Ponty, we can say that it is through these strong evaluations that we orient ourselves in "moral space".[33] All human beings inescapably exist in a space of questions about what they are, what they value, what they should/want to become. The prospect of escaping from answering these questions, from all "standards" is not a happy one. Far from being liberating, it would be a "terrifying lapse into total disorientation. It would be to suffer the ultimate crisis of identity."[34] This point is certainly not foreign to modern philosophy. We see Hegel making it repeatedly, for example in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right* where he defends the necessity of the indeterminate will's positing itself content in order to move from an abstraction to a reality. But in the late twentieth century, to *begin* from this insight and to build a moral philosophy on it is, for many, to be somewhat out of step with current philosophical and political trends. This, for example, would be the reaction of the "neo-Nietzcheans", as Taylor calls them, who would want to resist the very attempt here to get at the "truth of the matter" about moral agency in favour of a position which subscribed to no such theories and defended only the "primacy of the will".[35] This line of criticism is an important one, but I don't have the space to go into it. I raise it here only to acknowledge its presence.

Nevertheless, Taylor would defend strong evaluation as a condition of our ability to function as human beings in the way we do. But even prior to this is the moral space in which we inescapably exist, a space which demands that we have such strong evaluations in order to be able to find our way around in it, in order to have a sense of self.

> [H]uman beings always have a sense of self, in this sense, that they situate themselves somewhere in ethical space. Their sense of who they are is defined partly by some identification of what are truly important issues, or standards, or goods, or demands; and correlative to this, by some sense of where they stand relative to these or where they measure up on them or both.[36]

Beyond this conception of moral space, in "The Moral Topography of the Self", Taylor defends the thesis that the spatial image is "anchored in moral consciousness itself."[37] There he argues that moral space involves a sense of where our "moral sources" lie, where we derive our strength from, how we achieve integration when we feel "spiritually out of joint".[38] As evidence for this thesis, he cites the connection between the notion of moral sources and the distinctions "languages of discrimination" mark in us, for example, body/soul, reason/desire, will/knowledge. "Moral topographies provide the context in relation to which we can distinguish what we essentially are. They provide a principle of ordering the self."[39]

For Taylor, these are some of the basic requirements of being a human agent. Even a naturalist who would want to resist things like "standards" and "goods" could be caught out on the ad hominem point that she herself cannot but operate according to them. For example, in resisting this particular reading of human agency, she still has her own naturalist vision of what clairvoyant human action and thought would involve, of how we ought to live.[40] But Taylor wants to make a stronger argument. He wants to argue that these requirements are not some "optional extra" that we could in principle do without.[41] To argue that moral space and strong evaluation are fundamentally human *constructions* is to say "that we invent the questions as well as the answers."[42] Taylor believes this conclusion is simply wrong. Rather, through an articulation of structures such as strong evaluation and moral space, he hopes to substantiate the strong thesis that

he wants to make, namely, that such structures are "*constitutive* of [any possible] human agency".[43]

Identity, frameworks, and community

An important part of this articulation is devoted to filling in the gaps between strong evaluation and moral space. Strong evaluations are what orient us in moral space, this we now know. But if the goal here is to understand how people make sense of their lives, more explaining is needed. One crucial middle-term here that moves us in the direction of greater plausibility is identity. To say that strong evaluations orient us in moral space is to acknowledge that human beings cannot escape issues of the good but it is to leave out how an individual's position on various such questions cohere into an identity. People are not just walking compendiums of miscellaneous strong evaluations. Every individual also has some sense of having an identity. The connection here is that our identity is made up of strong evaluations that cohere to form it. "The notion of identity refers us to certain evaluations which are essential because they are the indispensable horizon or foundation out of which we reflect and evaluate as persons."[44]

Identities are about who we are. They are also about where we think we are going. Strong evaluations and the identities that they constitute are what give us our sense of what we value, what is good or right. For example, my commitment to the good of artistic expression is based on my strong evaluating it as something important in my life. But identities are not static. They themselves may change, and they also incorporate a sense of what we are trying to become. Although this sense may remain to a large extent unarticulated, people may nevertheless feel that they are moving towards or away from the good(s) incorporated in this sense.

> [T]his sense of the good has to be woven into my understanding of my life as an unfolding story. But this is to state another basic condition of making sense of ourselves, that we grasp our lives in a *narrative*. [...] [W]e determine what we are by what we have become, by the story of how we got there. Orientation in moral space turns out again to be similar to orientation in physical space.[45]

Plausibility is gained here again by drawing on human experience. Strong evaluations and identities are experienced dynamically, not statically.

Taylor further develops the story in *Sources of the Self* where he introduces a new term whose meaning is analogous to that of strong evaluations: "qualitative distinctions".[46] These he defines as pertaining to goods that are "incomparable", that is, they are not akin to ordinary ends or goods (such as food or shelter). Rather, "because of their special status they command our awe, respect, or admiration."[47] Now one way in which we have access to these qualitative distinctions, on which our identities are based, is through "frameworks" which incorporate a set of qualitative distinctions.

> Questions [about what makes a full life] can arise for people in any culture. Someone in a warrior society might ask whether his tale of courageous deeds lives up to the promise of his lineage or the demands of his station. People in a religious culture often ask whether the demands of conventional piety are sufficient for them or whether they don't feel called to some purer, more dedicated vocation. [...] But in each of these cases, some framework stands unquestioned which helps define the demands by which they judge their lives and measure, as it were, their fullness or emptiness.[48]

These frameworks thus stand independently of us, so to speak, as cultural resources on which we draw. Today, we are certainly in a different situation, as Taylor acknowledges. One fact of which we are all aware is that there is no one framework which we all share. And this in turn is responsible for our civilization being one in which people are so often engaged in trying to find meaning in their lives.[49] In spite of this, however, Taylor believes that we cannot and do not do without frameworks altogether.[50]

Human agents always have some sense of what it is good to be, of some mode of life that is fuller or higher than others, whether or not they live up to it. And this sense is not inwardly generated. On the contrary, it only exists in a social context. Here we come to another foundational element of Taylor's moral phenomenology: community. So far, we have been arguing as though the individual exists alone in moral space wherein s/he weaves together a patchwork of frameworks into a tapestry of qualitative distinctions that ultimately constitute his/her identity. The story is a little more complicated, and a little less smooth. This is not a monological affair. And it is not an entirely conscious one either. We'll examine these two points in order.

Frameworks are what open us to the "higher". "To think, feel, judge within such a framework is to function with the sense that some action, or mode of life, or mode of

feeling is incomparably higher than the others which are more readily available to us."[51] The three examples of such frameworks Taylor explores in *Sources of the Self* are the Enlightenment ideal of a self-responsible and critical reason, the Reformation affirmation of the ordinary life of work and family, and Romantic expressivism. But these frameworks are in turn only open to us in the context of a community or communities. We learn about what is good or admirable from those around us, largely from "significant others" who shape us early on. Of course we change and innovate ideas in the course of our lives, but this relation to some kind of defining community is inescapable.

> So I can only learn what anger, love, anxiety, the aspiration to wholeness, etc., are through my and others' experience of these being objects for *us*, in some common space. [...] This is the sense in which one cannot be a self on one's own. I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self definition; in another in relation to those who are now crucial to my continuing grasp of languages of self-understanding—and, of course, these classes may overlap. A self exists only within what I call 'webs of interlocution'.[52]

This primacy of the dialogical is seen most clearly in the way we learn our first language(s), as Wittgenstein has shown. It is through exposure to others speaking the language and through exchanges with them that we learn it, always in the context of a language community. We learn our first language by *engaging* with others, never passively. The point Taylor is making here is analogous: "One is a self only among other selves."[53]

There is another similarity here between the acquisition of language and identity-formation. Both happen in an inexplicit/unformulated fashion. We never learn our first language in the same way that we learn one as an adult. Similarly, our first moral language(s) are learned implicitly. What we learn is a sense of what is good or right, or what it is admirable to be, or what is valued. This sense may remain unformulated. An example Taylor provides in this regard is of the gentleman or the "macho" male. Such individuals may have no articulated explanation of what this entails, indeed they may refuse the very characterization itself. But this does not mean that they do not know how to act in a way that is consistently gentlemanly or macho.

> Take the example of the gentleman; or his seeming opposite, the macho male. In either case, there may be very little articulation of the norms, of how you have to act and feel in order to be a proper gentleman, or macho. But this will be carried in the way we act towards each other, towards women, etc.; and it will be carried also very much in the way we display ourselves to others; the way we present ourselves in public space. Style is extremely important here. This is another set of practices which are learned like a language, from others, with a minimum of formal articulation. Indeed, the real mark of a gentleman is to live by unwritten rules. Whoever needs to have the rules spelled out is not a gentleman.[54]

Here again we should see the analogy with Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein. Just because we do not have a formulated awareness of the qualitative distinctions, norms, or values we operate by does not mean that we are not moral agents. Strong evaluation is a precondition of articulacy; articulacy is *not* a precondition of strong evaluation.[55] (Nor is strong evaluation limited to the ethical, for all our talk of morality here. The aesthetic dimension, for example, also depends on it.)[56] In fact, much if not most of our moral lives consists of this pre-articulate sense of what is good or right, etc.

> [O]ur judgments of what to do take place in the context of a grasp of the good which is largely unarticulated. It consists largely of background understanding. Or else it is presented to us in paradigm persons or actions or in internalized habitus. It can be articulated to some degree in descriptions of the good, and this can be very important, both for our knowing what to do or be and because it can move us to do or be it. But these descriptions are only understood in the context of background understanding, acquired habits and paradigms, which can never be transcended or escaped.[57]

Moral agency thus also depends on some version of the notion of background explored in chapter one. This background is captured in different ways in contemporary social theory, for example in Bourdieu's notion of the "habitus", mentioned above, or in Habermas' "lifeworld".

Language and the disclosure of the good

But it need not remain inarticulate. Our capacity for language changes our situation fundamentally as we saw in chapter one. Through language, we can articulate some of this background, if only partially. This articulation, however, is not one of simple description. Taylor has chosen the word "articulation" deliberately. An object such as a table is something that we can get a good purchase on and can provide a more

or less accurate description of. The objects of moral articulation are not the same. Trying to describe our strong evaluations is not a clear-cut process—there is a large measure of both discovery and creation here. "Discovering here depends on, is interwoven with, inventing. Finding a sense to life depends on framing meaningful expressions which are adequate."[58] In addition, when we articulate what we feel/sense we also alter it. An explicited norm/value is different from an implicit one.

> Let us take the case [...] of the man who is fighting obesity and who is talked into seeing it as a merely quantitative question of more satisfaction, rather than as a matter of dignity and degradation. As a result of this change, his inner struggle itself becomes transformed, and is now quite a different experience. [...] We can say therefore that our self-interpretations are partly constitutive of our experience. For an altered description of our motivation can be inseparable from a change in this motivation.[59]

Language thus occupies a place of central importance in our moral self-understanding. It is a crucial part of the middle term in the Taylor's tripartite scheme of pre-understanding—articulation—understanding.

The relationship between language, strong evaluations, and articulacy, however is still a little more complicated than this. As it has been presented here, language seems to be a tool we apply to our moral life. We need to remember, however, both that full articulacy is impossible and that "forms of articulacy are [...] widely varied [and] philosophical definition is one mode".[60] But even if we grant these two points and a third—that language is not just being used to describe a pre-existing object, but that it can also shape and even help create it—we are still missing something here.

Like many "post-linguistic-turn" thinkers in the twentieth century, Taylor believes that the role of language in human life extends beyond its particular, explicit uses, such as the case of moral articulacy here. In this, language enters the realm of the inescapable. "Humans are language animals", or, as Aristotle defined it, the human being is *zoion ekhon logon*.[61] Now there are many directions in which this claim can lead, and Taylor himself pursues a few at various points.

In the last chapter we discussed the difference between the designative and expressive theories of language. The former theory sees words as signs we attach to 'ideas', those bits of representations of reality that exist in the mind, on Descartes' view.

Words help us obtain control over these bits which are then assembled according to a reliable procedure to obtain representations which correspond to reality. The outcome is knowledge. The meaning of words thus derives from that which they signify.[62] Taylor associates this view with Hobbes, Locke, and Condillac, but it can be traced all the way back to St. Augustine who saw meaning as consisting in the relationship between a word and an object (rather than the idea in the mind representing the object, which is Locke's amendment).[63] In our own day, Taylor believes that truth-conditional theories of meaning, such as that of Donald Davidson, continue in this tradition.[64]

The expressive theory, which Taylor associates with Herder and Romanticism, sees this use of language in which words are held to signify things or ideas, as a particular usage of language. Moreover, it is one we have *acquired*. This view wants to see language as originating out of the human capacity for expression, not representation. In the last chapter we discussed the connection between expression and the new form of consciousness language opens us to according to Herder: "reflective awareness". The expressive view highlights the use of language as a means of expressing oneself and one's awareness of the world. This view develops at a time where a new artistic ideal is gradually replacing the old, mimetic one. "Art is now seen not as imitation, but as creative expression. The work of art does not refer beyond itself to what it imitates; rather it manifests something; it is itself the locus in which the meaning becomes manifest."[65] Language also is primarily about expression and making manifest, not description.[66]

The debate between designativists and expressivists seems to revolve around the issue of origins. It seems to beg the question, "What does it matter *how* language evolved and which came first, expression or description? Isn't how we use it today what is important?" This is an important question, one which justifiably focusses the issue on the practical implications of this debate. Again, the answer here is a complex one. Part of Taylor's response involves highlighting another feature of the understanding of language in the Romantic tradition: the constitutive. Here we see more fully another aspect of what it means for Taylor for humans to be language animals. Right away, however, we need to broaden our conception of "language".

> Language, in the sense of prose speech, is not seen on its own, or together only with other media of depiction. It is part of a wide gamut, along with expressive gesture, and different media of art: the whole gamut of what Cassirer called the 'symbolic forms'.[67]

These various languages are responsible for helping to constitute our world. In Heideggerian terminology, they enable "disclosure".[68] Now there are many ways in which languages disclose/constitute our world. For example, language allows something to be an object of awareness (it enables reflective awareness), or in the context of a conversation, language constitutes a public space within which something can be an object for *us*, two interlocutors.[69]

But there is one sense in which language discloses that is particularly relevant for our purposes here, returning us to the discussion of moral phenomenology. In a word, language discloses the good. It is only through language that we can have any awareness of what is good or right. Again, however, articulation is not essential here. Prior to any articulation of what is good or right, we still consider humans to be moral agents. What is sufficient here is an awareness of the standards that apply. Other, non-human animals may act according to standards of some sort. Taylor gives an example of his cat who refuses to eat fish meal below a certain quality. The difference with humans here is that the cat does not recognize that it is applying standards. "But that is what an agent must be doing to be considered a moral subject. There is no such thing as morality completely *an sich*."[70] Thus the agent must be capable of being open to these standards, to recognizing significance in general. And for this, Taylor claims, "we have to have language."

> [T]o recognize in this sense, to mark the discrimination between, for instance, mere inclination and the right, or between what we love and what also calls on our benevolence and respect, we need to have articulated the domain of actions and ends or at least to have marked the relevant discrimination through expressive behaviour, for example, through ritual, gesture, or the style of comportment. [...] Thus, taking 'language' in a broad sense to include expressive activity, we can say that only language animals can be sensitive to standards *qua* standards.[71]

Language thus becomes a crucial condition for moral agency. Without it, the requisite awareness or recognition of standards (broadly conceived) through which we are able to have a sense of what is good would be impossible.

But this is not the same as saying that language *discloses* the good. For this, we need to return to our discussion towards the end of the last chapter where we raised the subject of the "significance feature" and human emotions. Taylor's elaborate discussion of human emotional phenomenology in his article "Self-interpreting Animals" can be read as an attempt to undercut the traditional understanding of what constitutes the "distinctively human". It is customarily *rationality* or *logos* (however conceived) that is designated as the crucial capacity which sets apart human from animal. Taylor, however, wants to define the difference from the perspective of emotions. He wants to claim that there are a certain set of emotions that are unique to human beings. They involve what he calls "subject-referring imports" such as shame, remorse, pride, dignity, etc.[72] We experience the emotion or feeling of shame because a certain situation is shameful, i.e., the import "shameful" can be attributed to it. I am able to feel emotions of shame, dignity, pride, etc. because I can characterize situations, events, etc. as having the associated imports. The advantage of introducing this idea of imports is that it highlights the way in which these qualities exist independently of me, i.e., I have not created them.

Although both the capacity for rationality and the capacity for this set of emotions are two ways of characterizing the human/non-human distinction, there is a further aspect to the emotional account that is not found in the rationality account. Subject-referring imports involve a sense of what matters to human beings as *subjects*, what they value.[73] And it is through emotions and feelings that these imports are accessed. Feelings become the mode of access to this domain of subject-referring imports.[74] The resulting subject-referring feelings incorporate a sense of what it is to be human, for they are feelings that only humans can experience.[75] Thus it is not just the capacity that is important here, but the content as well. These feelings are the ones by which we have a sense of who we are and what matters to us through their combination with imports which in turn, collectively, make up this domain of the distinctively human. It is only through feelings (e.g., of pride, dignity, wonder, shame, remorse, glory, etc.) that I can have a sense of the good.[76]

Now language is pivotal to this entire process. Above we saw that some symbolic medium was essential to moral agency. The latter required an awareness or recognition

of the standards according to which an individual operates. These standards in turn depend on the marking of distinctions/discriminations in some way, something for which language is needed. Here too, emotions such as pride, dignity, wonder, etc. are impossible without the operation of a symbolic medium of this sort.

> And hence only linguistic animals can have this kind of concern, for moral right and wrong. But something similar can be said for the whole range of concerns that we consider characteristically human. For instance a being can only feel shame who is aware of some demands which are laid on him in virtue of his being an agent among others. The same goes for someone who is capable of a sense of dignity, or a sense of pride, of an aspiration to fulfilment, to integrity, and so on. We are by no means talking only of admirable concerns. [...] Animals could not aspire to machismo, any more than they could to sanctity or wisdom.
>
> Thus man is a language animal, not just because he can formulate things and make representations, and thus think of matters and calculate, which animals cannot; but also because what we consider the essential human concerns are disclosed only in language, and can only be the concerns of a language animal.[77]

This then is the sense in which language discloses the good. Language both enables and continues to shape our moral agency.

At the most basic level, the very sense of something being right or good, embedded and unformulated as it may be, is impossible without some symbolic medium in which that sense may obtain expression. The distinctively human emotions (such as pride, dignity, shame, etc.) all require the distinctions/discriminations that language enables. Here we see the intimate connection between these emotions and strong evaluation. Strong evaluation is about making these distinctions/discriminations that language enables and which are constitutive of subject-referring imports. But these evaluations are in turn "anchored in feelings, emotions, aspirations; and could not motivate us unless they were."[78] Otherwise put, our distinctively human emotions incorporate strong evaluations.

At the most sophisticated level, it is through language that we are able to articulate the strong evaluations/qualitative distinctions on which we rely in our judgements and according to which we act. Together, these articulated evaluations/distinctions allow us to draw "moral maps" of ourselves which give us our orientation in moral space.[79] These moral maps can be construed as partial and tentative philosophical articulations of our

lived identities. As we bring these strong evaluations and qualitative distinctions to articulation, however, we may then evaluate the evaluations themselves, something which we do against the background of our other strong evaluations. Ultimately, this process can lead to what Taylor calls a "radical re-evaluation" in which our most basic evaluations are open to revision.[80] Radical re-evaluation is a "deep reflection, and a self-reflection in a special sense: it is a reflection about the self, its most fundamental issues, and a reflection which engages the self most wholly and deeply."[81] It requires a stance of openness to change, since at this level "there is certainly no meta-language available in which I can assess rival self-interpretations".[82] But this stance is not an easy one to maintain.

> If I am questioning whether smuggling a radio into the country is honest, or judging everything by the utilitarian criterion, then I have a yardstick, a definite yardstick. But if I go to the radical questioning, then it is not exactly that I have no yardstick, in the sense that anything goes, but rather that what takes the place of the yardstick is my deepest unstructured sense of what is important, which is as yet inchoate and which I am trying to bring to definition. I am trying to see reality afresh and form more adequate categories to describe it. To do this I am trying to open myself, use all of my deepest, unstructured sense of things in order to come to a new clarity.[83]

Once again we see the connection here to the approaches of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein, on Taylor's reading of them. Our moral agency, in the end, comes to depend fundamentally on a background, on this "deepest unstructured sense of what is important", something which we can never fully articulate and never fully make an object for us.[84] This is where we come up against the limits of language. While language is what crucially enables our moral agency, it does not enable us to, in turn, fully grasp that agency. But this is, after all, the early Wittgenstein's point about language, a point which extends to human agency in general.

To summarize, we can try to paint a picture of moral agency on Taylor's conception. The moral agent inescapably exists in moral space, a space of ethical questions about what it is right to do and good to be. Strong evaluations or qualitative distinctions are the rudiments of the moral agent's answers to these questions. Some of these evaluations and distinctions are bound up with the agent's emotional life, yielding distinctively human emotions such as pride, shame, dignity, wonder, joy, etc., and it is

through these emotions that an agent can have a full-blooded sense of the good. Together, an agent's strong evaluations comprise the moral map or identity through which she has a sense of who she is. This identity gives her an orientation in moral space and incorporates a narrative sense of where she has come from and where she is going.

All this does not happen monologically but dialogically. The self inescapably exists in a space of other selves. Through the various webs of interlocution in which the human being finds itself, the individual emerges. It is through these webs that the basic competences (e.g., linguistic, moral, etc.) we associate with human agency are learned. It is through these webs also that the frameworks of our society are accessed, frameworks that offer us substantive answers to the question of what it is good to be. And throughout her life, that individual will continue to define herself in relation to various types of communities, both consciously and unconsciously, or even "explicitly in relation to no web at all."[85]

Finally, we saw the constitutive role of language in moral agency. Strong evaluations are only possible where there is some symbolic medium operating through which distinctions may be marked. Through the distinctively human emotions which incorporate strong evaluations in the form of subject-referring imports, such as pride, shame, dignity, etc. we are able to access the good, have a sense of what is good. It is on this basic level of our moral phenomenology that language is said to disclose the good. But language is also crucial to moral articulacy, in the reflection on our strong evaluations, the drawing of moral maps, and in the process of radical re-evaluation.

Strong evaluation, moral space, webs of interlocution, language—through a detailed exploration of all these concepts, Taylor presents us with an elaborate portrait of human moral agency. This moral phenomenology is designed to help us get clearer on what we are as human beings and to inform our action and thought. Clairvoyancy is the goal here. But this Taylorian understanding of clairvoyancy is conspicuously absent from contemporary moral and political theory. This absence is very serious according to Taylor. Recall from chapter one Taylor's drawing our attention to the normativity of theory. Theory does not exist in a vacuum. It can and does have a significant capacity for shaping our self-understanding. We need to pay close attention to how a theory

which deliberately focusses on a certain set of issues can slide into defining the object of its consideration according to those issues. This is the fundamental problem, Taylor believes, with much contemporary moral and political theory. It has focussed on issues of what it is right to do and has consequently assumed a procedural form in at least two ways: how one should act when our actions impinge on others (e.g., in keeping with the prohibitions of basic rights and freedoms) and how one should define how one should act (e.g., according to some principle or criterion such as the categorical imperative). The fatal move in this context comes when this set of issues and the procedural form comes to define for us what morality and politics are really all about. Although Taylor's careful articulation of his theory of moral phenomenology does, admittedly, take direct aim at naturalist attempts to reduce our understanding of moral agency to terms consistent with the language(s) of science, it is also aimed at forestalling and correcting the tendency to make this fatal move. In the following two chapters, we will see how he draws on his theory to launch a full scale attack on the proceduralism of contemporary moral and political theory.

III: PROCEDURALISM AND CONTEMPORARY MORAL THEORY

Taylor's approach to the study of human agency and his theory of moral phenomenology, of which it is a product, have serious implications for mainstream contemporary moral theory. In chapter one, we set out what this approach involves: a hermeneutical-phenomenological method whose primary goal is the uncovering and articulation of the inescapable structures of human agency. In chapter two, the fruits of this approach in the domain of moral experience were discussed. There we encountered concepts such as strong evaluation, qualitative distinctions and moral frameworks, and webs of interlocution. One of Taylor's chief goals, both in his approach and in the resulting moral phenomenology, is to broaden and enrich our understanding of what it is to be human. As we have repeatedly seen, this goal has its origin in Taylor's reaction to what he calls "traditional epistemology". The key insight informing this reaction is the awareness of the need to understand the various aspects and domains of human agency in an open-minded manner, that is, to be open to more than one way of understanding. Specifically, he wants to challenge the predominance of the "epistemological" way of understanding "which has had such a distorting effect on the theoretical self-understanding of moderns":

> This is something which is above all visible in the sciences of man, but I think it has wreaked as great havoc in ethical [or moral] theory.
>
> The distortive effect comes in that we tend to start formulating our meta-theory of a given domain with an already formed model of valid reasoning, all the more dogmatically held because we are oblivious to the alternatives. This model then makes us quite incapable of seeing how reason does and can really function in the domain, to the degree that it does not fit the model. We cut and chop the reality of, in this case, ethical thought to fit the Procrustean bed or our model of validation. Then, since meta-theory and theory cannot be isolated from one another, the distortive conception begins to shape our ethical thought itself.[1]

Now the debate between, on the one hand, Taylor's approach to human agency and his theory of moral phenomenology and, on the other, contemporary moral theory occurs precisely at this level of "meta-theory".

Meta-theory has to do with deciding what form a theory should take, how it should be constructed, what it should include, etc. whereas the actual theory is used to explain and understand the domain it applies to. Taylor's problems with contemporary

moral theory thus really have to do with meta-theory since the bad moral *theory* he sees, according to which we are supposed to explain and understand our moral experiences, actually originates in the bad moral *meta*-theory of which it is a product. Now Taylor wants to claim in turn that this bad moral meta-theory is itself a product of a mistaken approach to understanding human agency, one which privileges, in part, the epistemological. But there are other sources, such as naturalism. It is through his alternative approach to human agency and through his elaboration of moral phenomenology, that Taylor equips himself with the necessary weapons to launch a full-scale attack on contemporary moral theory, and, in particular, its meta-theoretical assumptions. In this chapter we will examine this attack in detail, looking first at the main problems Taylor has with contemporary moral theory, then at the sources of its meta-theory, and finally at Taylor's most important proposals in this field. The focus here is on exposing the extent to which contemporary moral theory blinds us to the wider context of moral agency and its requirements. This lays down the necessary groundwork for our examination, in the final chapter, of the importation of proceduralism in moral theory into political theory and its implications.

An overview of the problem

When Taylor speaks of contemporary or modern moral theory/philosophy, he has in mind, first and foremost, a certain bent that we find in much mainstream moral theory: its narrow focus on what it is *right* to *do*. He does occasionally speak of specific theorists, most notably Jürgen Habermas (whose discourse ethics theory of morality/justice we will only consider in detail in the next chapter). But more often than not, Taylor is usually speaking of or implying a wide trend that characterizes not only moral theory but the moral self-understanding of moderns and contemporaries.

> Much contemporary moral philosophy, particularly but not only in the English-speaking world, has given such a narrow focus to morality [...] This moral philosophy has tended to focus on what it is right to do rather than on what it is good to be, on defining the content of obligation rather than the nature of the good life; and it has no conceptual place left for a notion of the good as the object of our love or allegiance [...] This philosophy has accredited a cramped and truncated view of morality in a narrow sense, as well as of the whole range of issues involved in the attempt to live the best possible life, and this not only among professional philosophers, but with a wider public.[2]

Thus the theory Taylor is concerned with grows out of a belief in what is commonly termed in such theory the priority of the right over the good. Right away, we need to clarify just what this belief entails. To use Taylor's terminology, is it an ontological belief or an advocacy belief?[3] That is, is it a claim about the nature of human agency or is it more of a hortatory claim, arguing that, quite apart from the nature of human agency, moral theory can only proceed on the basis of this priority? For the most part, Taylor treats the priority of the right over the good in these theories as a hortatory claim, for example, in the case of Habermas' moral theory and the assumptions of Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*.

This points to a second and related but perhaps more accurate way of conceiving the narrowness of contemporary moral theory: the separation of the moral and the ethical. The moral domain is seen as the realm of conventions having to do with how we treat other people, how we act understood in terms of how our actions affect other people. The ethical domain is the realm of what the good life is understood to be in all its richness, what makes life meaningful or worth living. Typically, on the dominant paradigm in contemporary moral theory, this is portrayed as entirely subjective, the determination of what constitutes the good life is left up to the cultural domain and the personal choice of the individual. It is only when an individual's conception of the good life leads him/her to take actions that adversely affect other individuals that, according to this type of theory, we enter the moral domain.

This primacy of the "right" or the "moral" as understood here did not just appear out of thin air. Briefly, according to Taylor, the sources of this belief in the primacy of a moral domain can be found in the inability of contemporary theories to acknowledge any sense of the "incomparably important".[4] They have "no way of capturing the background understanding surrounding any conviction that we ought to act in this or that way—the understanding of the strong good involved."[5] That is: any conception of *how* to act always exists against a background that endows it with meaning and shows *why* acting in that way is good. Taylor's point here is the point of chapter two: that there is always a background understanding (consisting of strong evaluations) of what it is good to be that informs our conception of what it is right to do.

This same theoretical commitment to "background" is also the source of Taylor's second major complaint with contemporary moral theory and understanding: their conception of practical reason. Practical reason is understood here in procedural terms. Morality is about obligation—what we are obliged to do, how we are obliged to act—and practical reason is about defining the content of that obligation. If reason is expected to resolve moral disputes by proving to us who is right and who is wrong, then we are fully entitled to throw our arms up in despair, for this is impossible.[6] The belief that reason should be able to do this rests on a prior commitment to a foundationalist conception of reason, something Taylor also wants to challenge, as we have already seen. Reason, on this conception, is severely limited in its powers, and this in turn leads us to moral skepticism—"If God does not exist, then everything is permitted."[7] Modern moral theories step in at this point and invoke "formalisms" to overcome this skepticism.[8] Human morality is reduced to the moral 'domain' in which formal principles of action are to guide us. The two most important modern principles were those of utilitarianism—"the greatest good for the greatest number"—and Kant—"the categorical imperative".[9] The task of practical reason in contemporary moral theory became the definition of such principles according to which our action is to be guided. Hence Taylor's labelling of such theories of obligatory action as "single-criterion moralities". In contrast, the conception of practical reason Taylor wants to argue for sees it as drawing on the implicit strong evaluations that inform our actions and thoughts in order to elucidate and articulate what we are already committed to both individually and collectively.

Taylor's two broad challenges to contemporary moral theory thus have to do with 1) the role of "the good" in any attempt to explain and understand human morality, and 2) the conception of practical reason. His central claims in this regard are that contemporary moral theory has too narrow a focus, human morality having been foreshortened to include only what it is right to do, and that practical reason must not be conceived of on a foundationalist model. Central to both these claims is the certainty on Taylor's part that moral theory must reflect more adequately the full complexity of our moral phenomenology and the context this provides for our moral agency. That is, the "content" of our moral theories must take seriously the "context" of our moral phenomenology. Taylor has his own proposals both about how notions of the good can

be incorporated into moral theory and about how to broaden our conception of practical reason. But before we turn to these proposals, we would do well to consider in more detail how this narrow focus on the 'moral' and the foundationalist mode of practical reason came to hold such sway in the contemporary world. This is an important part of Taylor's project. Tracing the lineage of these theories allows us to evaluate better whether they are built on firm ground or not. Much of this lineage helps explain why the theories we have today assume the form they do, and yet much of this lineage is also hidden from sight, requiring an exercise in retrieval in order to cast light on it again.[10]

Tracing the lineage of contemporary moral theory: naturalist, epistemological, and moral motives

It should come as no surprise that much of the retrieval Taylor undertakes with respect to moral theory overlaps in significant ways with the retrieval we examined in chapter one of the development of the epistemological approach to studying human agency. In both cases, Taylor's historical tracing amounts to laying bare the *motives* for adopting particular approaches to human agency and morality.[11] These motives are complex and intertwine with each other, but taken together, they contribute to a fuller understanding of our present moral predicament and how we got here. There are basically three orders of motives that Taylor discusses: naturalist, epistemological, and moral motives. All three orders combine to render unproblematic and even self-evident the moral and political theories Taylor associates with the "procedural theory tradition": from Bentham, through Kant, to Rawls, Dworkin, and Habermas, and anticipated by Grotius in his theory of legitimacy.[12]

Naturalism, as we saw in the last chapter, bids us to do without strong evaluation. Human beings should be understood in terms continuous with the natural sciences.[13] We must overcome the need to invoke anthropocentric properties in our understanding of human behaviour. Things like qualitative distinctions and goods have no foundation in nature—they cannot figure in an objective account of the world and ourselves. What we need to strive for is moral objectivity. And notions of the good life, it is claimed, only take us back into the realm of the subjective and arbitrary. Utilitarianism addresses this concern with the lack of a foundation for qualitative distinctions by levelling the whole

moral domain and reducing all moral/ethical questions to a single issue: happiness. In our own day, examples of moral theories taking root in this naturalist rejection of qualitative distinctions are John Mackie's sociobiological "error theory" or Simon Blackburn's consequentialist theory.[14] But the theories we are concerned with here have naturalism as only one of their underlying motives. Growing out of this naturalist suspicion of qualitative distinctions are the epistemological and moral motives.

It was mainly the dawning of a mechanistic understanding of the world and the progress of the natural sciences that fuelled naturalism and the corresponding metaphysical views of thinkers like Hobbes and Locke. Irretrievably lost was the notion of a cosmic order, originally inspired by Plato's theory of the Forms. In pre-modern Europe, explanation and practical reason were not separable: "the activity of explaining why things are as they are (what we think of as science) [was] intrinsically linked to the activity of determining what the good is, and in particular how human beings should live through attuning themselves to this order."[15] Reason was conceived of substantively. Understanding the world correctly meant getting it right, having the right vision of things, e.g., grasping the cosmic order determined through eternity by God. With the demise of any such notion of a meaningful order and the concomitant rise of a mechanistic world outlook, practical reason had to be reconceived in procedural terms. (At the same time, the account can run in a different direction, as we saw in chapter one. On this reading, the origins of the move to mechanism are to be found in the nominalist rebellion against Thomism and the rejection of a fixed cosmic order that in effect put limits on God's sovereignty. Mechanism allowed the determination of ultimate ends to be returned to their rightful place: God's will. This paves the way for the later transfer of this power of determination to human beings.[16])

With Descartes and Locke, we see the redefinition of reason in procedural terms. The focus is no longer on the fixed order of meanings, but rather on the process through which I acquire knowledge of the world. Whether it be through "clear and distinct ideas" or according to "rules of believable evidence", reliable knowledge can now be the product only of a reliable method. This new understanding of reason in turn influences moral theory. Without any foundations (such as that of a cosmic order) to appeal to, morality risks being hijacked by subjectivism. As we saw above, this is where procedural

moral theories come into play. Issues of the good life are certainly not amenable to rational arbitration (on this conception of rationality, that is), but in moral disputes where questions of "the right" are concerned, reason plays a crucial role. Here reason calls for disengagement from established practices and institutions. Disengaged reason "strives to draw as little as possible on our implicit understanding of the context of practice in which we act, to offer wherever possible explicit criteria of identification, so that discourse is as far as possible comprehensible independent of particular life experiences and cultural settings."[17] Moral rationality thus now amounts to identifying which actions qualify as moral and then applying a principle (e.g., the categorical imperative) in order to determine how to act.[18] On the reading given so far then, naturalism originally undercut the moral domain as a whole by questioning the continued reliance on anything that smacked of the metaphysical. But epistemology stepped in to lend a helping hand and prevent the slide to moral skepticism and subjectivism by narrowing the focus of morality to the 'moral domain' and by reformulating practical reason in procedural terms. As significant as the naturalist and epistemological motives are, however, on Taylor's account it is the moral motives that exercise the greatest influence. For these explain how and why people were attracted and drawn to the new picture of moral agency that developed out of this naturalist (mechanistic) and epistemological conception of the world.

Building on the naturalist suspicion of qualitative distinctions was a hostility to the "higher". This was seen most clearly during the Reformation which saw the rejection of claims to greater holiness or piety associated with monasticism, priesthood, and other such vocations. It was not *what* one did that pleased God, but *how* one did it, namely, worshipfully—"God loveth adverbs".[19] Taylor traces to this period the peculiarly modern ideal he names "the affirmation of ordinary life".[20] While eschewing all claims to the "higher", which were inherently discriminatory in nature, this ideal affirmed the value of the life of "production and reproduction", of work and family—an ideal to which all could aspire. The moral motive of a radical equality thus embraced the naturalist inspired abandonment of the qualitative distinctions that were at the heart of the hierarchies which for centuries had justified all sorts of inequalities spiritually, socially, politically, and economically.

Closely connected with this was the modern notion of freedom as the freedom from arbitrary external authority.[21] The demise of belief in a cosmic order meant a new found freedom for the individual. Liberated from the qualitative distinctions that had bound them before, individuals could now be free in a new quintessentially modern way: to determine for themselves their own ends. "Normative orders must originate in the will."[22] This understanding of freedom was in turn tied to the new understanding of knowledge that had developed. The relationship between the moral motive of freedom, and the naturalist and epistemological motives already discussed, is succinctly depicted by Taylor in the following passage.

> An Aristotelian theory seems to determine my paradigm purposes from the order of nature. To be guided by reason is to be guided by insight into this order. But the modern notion of reason is of a capacity which is procedurally defined. We are rational to the extent that our thinking activity meets certain procedural standards, such as consistency, the analysis of problems into elements, the making of clear and distinct connections, attention to the evidence, conformity to the rules of logic, and the like. To be guided by reason now means to direct one's action according to plans or standards which one has constructed following the canons of rational procedure. [...] Rational direction is therefore seen as synonymous with freedom understood as self-direction, direction according to orders constructed by the subject, as against those which he is supposed to find in nature.[23]

These motives combine to give us a new conception of the human agent, radically different from the pre-modern one. Taylor quotes Iris Murdoch's eloquent description of this "new man":

> How recognizable, how familiar to us is the man so beautifully portrayed in the *Grundlegung*, who confronted even with Christ turns away to consider the judgment of his own conscience and to hear the voice of his own reason. Stripped of the exiguous metaphysical background which Kant was prepared to allow him, this man is with us still, free, independent, lonely, powerful, rational, responsible, brave, the hero of so many novels and books of moral philosophy.[24]

This mention of Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in which he introduced the categorical imperative, leads us back to our subject here—modern moral theory—whose motives we have been tracing. The naturalist, epistemological, and moral motives we have been discussing so far all help to explain why issues of the good have been excluded from moral theory. "Awareness of their place in our moral lives has been so deeply suppressed that the thought [that moral philosophy should concern itself with

our different visions of the qualitatively higher, with strong goods] never seems to occur to many of our contemporaries."[25] But the question remains: from whence does moral theory derive the focus it does have? Here we encounter another moral motive whose origins lie in Christianity: "practical benevolence".[26] Taylor attributes to Bacon one of the earliest articulations of the modern form of this ideal in his call for science to "relieve the condition of mankind".[27] Charitable and altruistic motives should guide the individual, and these necessarily entail acts.

> This can seem to give independent justification to the exclusive focus on action in much contemporary moral theory. This focus can be represented as being a sign of moral earnestness, of benevolent determination. Those who are concerned about what is valuable, what one should love or admire, are worried about the state of their own souls. They are self-absorbed, prone to narcissism, and not committed to altruistic action, the improvement of the lot of mankind, or the defence of justice.[28]

Practical benevolence thus forms the basis of modern and contemporary moral theory's concern with justice, human rights, equality, and other such issues relating to the intersubjective or the space *between* people and the actions that occur in that space. A troubling effect of this exclusive focus is the shift from, so to speak, decision to definition. Instead of it being a conscious decision of moral theories to focus on this particular set of issues, the moral 'domain' comes to be defined in its terms alone. This was Taylor's point above that our meta-theory ends up shaping our ethical thought. Taylor has two related criticisms of this narrowing/foreshortening of the concerns of moral theory. Together they address in a new way a question that is often raised in relation to procedural moral theories such as Habermas': "Why be moral?" The novelty of Taylor's approach to this question lies in the nature of his response. Carefully avoiding the precipice of foundationalism, he instead follows down the path trodden before him by Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Merleau-Ponty and draws on the articulation of the background to moral agency he has laid out in his account of moral phenomenology.

Where's the good? Why be moral?

The most significant difference between contemporary moral theories and Taylor's moral phenomenology lies in the role accorded to notions of the good. The

former have no place for such notions, for reasons already discussed, focussing rather on questions of the right and procedures for deciding such questions. Now Taylor's account may be substantive by contrast, but this in no way means he is taking us back to the substantivism of the ancient and medieval world, i.e., to a notion of a cosmic order. Nor does it mean that he wants to defend some absolute metaphysical existence of some conception of a/the good. As we saw in the last chapter, intrinsic to his study of moral phenomenology is an openness to the way people actually live and make sense of their lives. And it turns out that people *cannot* make sense of their lives without some notion of what is good in their lives or the world around them. Taylor captures this inescapable feature of human existence with the term "strong evaluation" as we saw in chapter two.

> A fully competent human agent not only has some understanding (which may be also more or less *mis*understanding) of himself, but is partly constituted by this understanding. But [this] still does not capture the crucial point. This is that our self-understanding essentially incorporates our seeing ourselves against a background of what I have called 'strong evaluation'. I mean by that a background of distinctions between things which are recognized as of categoric or unconditioned or higher importance or worth, and things which lack this or are of lesser value.
>
> In other terms, to be a full human agent, to be a person or a self in the ordinary meaning, is to exist in a space defined by distinctions of worth. A self is a being for whom certain questions of categoric value have arisen, and received at least partial answers. [...] My claim is that this is not just a contingent fact about human agents, but is essential to what we would understand and recognize as full, normal human agency.[29]

Now the problem with contemporary moral theory extends beyond the fact that the conception of moral agency it presents us with has no room for strong evaluation, a feature crucial to our moral agency and self-understanding. It extends also to the implications this absence of strong evaluation has for the moral theory itself.

On one reading, contemporary moral theory serves: 1) to identify which actions/situations qualify as moral, and 2) to instruct us as to how to proceed in such cases. But what compels us to proceed in the manner the theory bids us to other than some sense that this is how we *should* act? For example, in the case of the categorical imperative, when it tells me that I should not steal, it is respect for the moral law that compels me to follow this order.[30] This respect for the moral law is a prime example of a strong evaluation—the moral law is respected as something of 'higher importance or

worth'. But where strong evaluation has no such role, as in the "discourse ethics" moral theory of Habermas, how are we to justify following the moral norms that are generated? Or, even earlier on, what compels me to enter into rational discourse in the first place? In short, "Why be moral?"

> As an actor, I can always ask the question why I should actually proceed according to a particular norm, namely rationally. Why should this be a norm that I cannot deny? This is a question which one can only answer, to use my own terminology, with 'strong valuations'. [...]
>
> Habermas, however, wishes to limit himself to a purely proceduralist ethics. We strive, according to his underlying principle, to reach rational understanding. We should endeavour to replace non-rational mechanisms of action coordination by rational forms of reaching understanding. Yet this demand is also confronted by the question why I should strive for this. [...] I nevertheless also have other aims, other interests. Why then should I prefer rational understanding?[31]

Habermas' discourse ethics theory of morality/justice, which we will consider in more detail in the next chapter, claims that we can rationally justify in a collective discourse, through a universalization principle, certain moral norms (i.e., those capable of rational justification). He claims that such abstractly validated norms can once again obtain social acceptability through being re-incorporated into the ethical context of the "lifeworld".[32] Although Taylor is skeptical of the plausibility of such a separation of moral and ethical, his more pressing question has to do with the motives for entering discourse in the first place. Habermas' theory tells us that we should prefer rational understanding and strive for it because this is what language, properly understood, requires. The example of the "ideal speech situation" is used in this regard. The question, however, remains. What compels me to heed the requirements of the ideal speech situation? Surely, Taylor wants to argue, there is a strong evaluation involved, one that is deep enough to garner widespread support? "It [the preference for rational understanding] is nonetheless very convincing for us as contemporaries [...] only because we implicitly share a concept of humankind which allocates a central position to discourse and reaching rational understanding."[33]

Taylor has a term to designate something which is the object of widespread allegiance and is given such a central position in our concept of humankind: he calls them *hypergoods*.[34] He defines these as "goods which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which these [others] must be

weighed, judged, decided about."[35] Ordinary life goods include goods such as financial success or sexual fulfillment and do not command the same degree of respect or authority as hypergoods. Perhaps the most important hypergood of modern culture is notion of universal justice or benevolence.[36] Rational mastery could also qualify as a modern hypergood, and it is precisely our commitment to it in this form that underlies Habermas' moral theory.

> The fact that we should prefer rational understanding to norm-free steering mechanisms is closely bound up with our understanding of human dignity, which, in turn, is inseparable from certain concepts of self-development and self-obligation.[37]

In short, Habermas' attempt to strictly separate ethical issues from moral ones is doomed to failure. For one thing, the very vision of moral (as opposed to ethical) agency that his theory proposes depends crucially on our subscription to certain goods. (We shall pick up on this point again in our more detailed discussion of Habermas in the next chapter.)

Rational mastery is one such good. At the same time, however, the hypergood of universal justice plays no less a role. But contemporary moral theories, restricted as they are to issues of the right and a procedural form, are "constitutionally incapable of coming clean about the deeper sources of their own thinking."[38] In exploring the various orders of motives inspiring modern moral theory, we saw how this led to a suppression of qualitative distinctions.

> It seems that they are motivated by the strongest moral ideals, such as freedom, altruism, universalism. These are among the central moral aspirations of modern culture, the hypergoods which are distinctive to it. And yet what these ideals drive the theorists towards is a denial of all such goods. They are caught in a strange pragmatic contradiction, whereby the very goods which move them push them to deny or denature all such goods.[39]

The sense of the "incomparably important" or "higher worth" one associates with moral actions as opposed to ordinary actions as conceived by these theories should, according to Taylor, ideally be acknowledged as linked to the strong evaluation(s) we culturally share in the form of a commitment to the hypergoods of justice and freedom, among others. Instead, such theories capture this sense by "segregating off a domain of the 'moral' and hermetically sealing it from other considerations. 'Moral' defines a certain kind of reasoning, which in some unexplained way has in principle priority."[40] In the case of

Habermas, we saw that this boundary is defended by separating off the ethical from the moral—"between demands of truly universal validity and goods which will differ from culture to culture."[41] This boundary cannot be defended, however, for moral theories simply cannot exist without some role for the good, according to Taylor. "My claim is that any theory which claims to make the right primary really reposes on such a notion of the good, in the sense that one needs to articulate this view of the good in order to make its motivations clear."[42]

Thus by foreshortening its conception of morality to include only issues of the right, contemporary moral theory 1) presents us with an understanding of moral agency that contradicts the context of our lived moral experience, and 2) undermines the source of motivations that impel people to act morally. For these two reasons, strong evaluation and the goods and hypergoods that derive from it must figure in any moral theory that can claim to be accurate and effective. The key insight here is that people want to be moral because it is a good way to be.

> The obligation to do and the goodness in being are two facets, as it were, of the same sense. Each totally without the other would be something very different from our moral sense: a mere compulsion on the one hand, a detached sense of superiority of one way over another, on the other hand, comparable to my aesthetic appreciation of cumulus over nimbus clouds, not making any demands on me as an agent. Contemporary philosophy has explored one facet at length but has said almost nothing about the other.[43]

Such silence is not a bad thing for this reason alone. Beyond this, it is also dangerous. For the modern West to continue to be committed to the tall moral orders it has set for itself, namely the commitment to the hypergoods of universal justice, benevolence, freedom, and equality, Taylor firmly believes that some strong moral sources are needed. But again, before the issue of moral sources can be broached, what is needed at the very least is *articulacy* about these hypergoods. The silence of contemporary moral theory must be broken. We shall return to this in the conclusion to this chapter and in the next chapter where we will consider a new contribution to articulacy about the ethical context, albeit politically, in Rawls' *Political Liberalism*. Now we must turn to another aspect of contemporary moral theory where the importance of articulacy is also hidden from sight, its conception of practical reason.

Models of practical reason: apodictic vs. ad hominem

Moral skepticism is a multifaceted phenomenon, the result of a particular conception of knowledge that has grown up in the modern West, this in turn shaped by naturalist suspicion of all things metaphysical.

> Our modern conceptions of practical reason are shaped—I might say distorted—by the weight of moral skepticism. Even conceptions that intend to give no ground to skepticism have frequently taken form in order best to resist it, or to offer the least possible purchase to it. In this, practical reason falls into line with a pervasive feature of modern intellectual culture, which one could call the primacy of the epistemological: the tendency to think out the question of what something *is* in terms of the question of how it is *known*.[44]

Well, what other ways are there to thinking out "what something is"? This takes us back to chapter one and the various challenges to the epistemological tradition (which focusses on the question of "how it is known"). There we saw how Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein, in addition to being "the most important critics of epistemology", also offered "new construals of knowledge."[45] These new construals involve understanding the role of background in human agency and the primacy of practices in grounding our knowledge claims.

Taylor's argument is that moral skepticism results in large part from the application of a wrong model of practical reason, one based on this primacy of the epistemological. He calls it the "apodictic" model of practical reason, a model that pervades not only modern moral theory but, more disturbingly for Taylor, our moral self-understanding.[46] One example he provides to illustrate this model is the case of the Nazis. He asks, "Is there no way to show them wrong?"

> If "showing them" means presenting facts or principles which they cannot but accept and which are sufficient to disprove their position, then we are indeed incapable of doing this. But one could argue that that is a totally wrong view of practical reason. Faced with an opponent who is *unconfusedly* and *undividedly* convinced of his position, one can indeed only hope to move him rationally by arguing from the ground up, digging down to the basic premises we differ on, and showing him to be wrong there. But is this really our predicament? Do we really face people who quite lucidly reject the very principle of the inviolability of human life?[47]

Taylor does not believe we do. And the fact that the Nazis had to undertake all sorts of "special pleading" to justify their actions (e.g., their victims were not of the same species,

were mortally dangerous, etc.) shows this.[48] His point here is that if we subscribe to an understanding of practical reason which sees its task as *arguing* people into morality, then we are doomed to failure. To argue someone into morality would be to provide them with grounds that they would not be able to reject, from which all moral injunctions would follow. This is analogous to the focus in contemporary moral theory on finding principles which can instruct us on how to act in all "moral" situations. That practical reason should be capable of this is linked to the belief in a certain understanding of "foundations":

> This word is bad, because it implies something to the philosophical ear which is impossible. It implies that you could argue someone who shared absolutely no moral sense at all into morality. "Foundations" means you would have to take him from point zero of moral commitment to the full sweep of obligations you generate by your calculus. This cannot be done, but there is no reason to think that it ought to be, that something terrible is missing because it cannot be.[49]

Practical reason just cannot be seen as building from the ground up. There is something already there, some "moral sense" on which it draws. As we saw in chapter two, individuals are socialized into moral languages in their communities or "webs of interlocution". Practical reason would be an impossibility without this pre-existing basis. And it is once again the tremendous influence of the epistemological tradition that has skewed our understanding of this moral sense, indeed hidden it from sight. It is responsible for the inarticulacy Taylor sees in contemporary moral theories.

What is missing from this conception of practical reason is the complex background to our moral agency. And what does this background consist of? Largely, strong evaluations. Whether they are generated individually, formulated in dialogue with others, or handed down to us by our culture(s), these strong evaluations are at the basis of our moral agency. They enable us to orient ourselves in moral space, that is, in the space of ethical questions we cannot avoid, e.g., about what it is good to be. They form the core of our identities. Practical reason cannot exist without this background of strong evaluations—"by its very nature practical reason can only function within the context of some implicit grasp of the good".[50] The first thing contemporary moral theory needs to do is to become articulate about the very existence of this context and its importance for practical reason. But how does acknowledging this context change anything? Indeed, it

calls for much change, as our discussion of the motivation to be moral above illustrates. And in the case of practical reason, it calls for a fundamentally different understanding of what this entails. Here we encounter the role articulacy plays *within* practical reason.

When we are faced with the justifications a Nazi could provide for the extermination of the Jews, we do not simply conclude that, although we do not share these justifications, we will just have to agree to disagree. There is a basic common premise here about the sanctity of human life that generates both the need for the Nazis to undertake such special pleading and our own moral outrage. Articulating this common premise is part of the moral argument we launch against them. Taylor believes that this form of articulation is central to practical reason. It involves "bringing to light something the interlocutor cannot repudiate."[51] Taylor calls this model of practical reason *ad hominem*.[52]

> On this model [...] practical argument starts off on the basis that my opponent already shares at least some of the fundamental dispositions toward good and right which guide me. The error comes from confusion, unclarity, or an unwillingness to face some of what he can't lucidly repudiate; and reasoning aims to show up this error. Changing someone's moral views by reasoning is always at the same time increasing his self-clarity and self-understanding.[53]

But isn't this like arguing from "is" to "ought" all over again? Taylor himself asks: "Isn't this exactly where Mill commits the notorious 'naturalistic fallacy,' arguing from the fact that men desire happiness to its desirability?"[54] The problem here has to do with the nature of what it is we are committed to. The fact that we desire something, say strawberry ice cream, in no way shows that we *ought* to desire it. Such a desire qualifies as a "weakly evaluated end".[55] *Strong* evaluations, however, have to do with ends we characterize in different terms, e.g., as more worthy or admirable or noble.

> We have to distinguish between showing of some end that we can't help desiring it and showing that all our strong evaluations presuppose it, or involve it, once we overcome our confusions about them. In the second case, we would have demonstrated that we can't be lucid about ourselves without acknowledging that we value this end. This is the sense in which it is inescapable, not after the fashion of some de facto addiction [e.g., smoking]. Whereas addictions are rightly declared irrelevant to moral argument, except perhaps negatively, the proof of inescapable commitment is of the very essence of the second, ad hominem mode of practical reasoning, and is central to the whole enterprise of moral clarification.[56]

Practical reason is thus the primary tool of moral articulacy, specifically, articulacy about strong evaluations. Here we come up against questions about the powers or capacities of practical reason.

Taylor's defence of practical reason is of a situated practical reason. It is not about seeking independent and universal foundations. Rather, it is about operating within a particular context and achieving clarification within that context. Here Taylor is building on Hegel's insight into the inescapability of *Sittlichkeit*. On the social level, moral argument should involve, in part, the clarification of what we are already committed to collectively, the goods and hypergoods that are informing the moral claims we make. In this regard, Taylor proposes a different reading of the role of language than the one we see in Habermas. Language becomes one means through which we can uncover our collective moral commitments since it is only through language that these commitments can exist and obtain expression. This refers us back to the end of chapter two. Language can thus be used to elucidate not a proceduralist but a substantive ethics.[57] Such clarity and articulacy about these collective commitments is essential to an honest and effective debate.

And on the individual level, moral argument can involve helping someone to get clearer about the goods or values that she herself is already committed to but is unclear about or denying for some reason. The question of ultimate justification is left open. To conceive of practical reason apodictically "sets an impossible task for it."[58] Foundationalism leads to a dead end. Rather, the ad hominem model of practical reason follows the lead of a (broadly understood) "phenomenological" philosophical stance.

> By this I mean a focus on our actual practices of moral deliberation, debate, understanding. The attempt is to show, in one way or another, that the vocabularies we need to explain human thought, action, feeling, or to explicate, analyze, justify ourselves to each other, or to deliberate on what to do, all inescapably rely on strong evaluation.[59]

In this practical reason is supremely *practical*. Situated in a particular context, and drawing on the actual experiences within that context, it aids our moral deliberation and understanding by enabling greater articulacy. But this articulacy is more the outcome of practical reason. What is missing from this picture is the *process* of practical reason itself. How is this greater articulacy achieved?

The activity of practical reason: transitions, comparative propositions, and epistemic gains

Taylor provides an example relating to perception to illustrate what is involved in this process. He walks into a room and sees a pink elephant with yellow polka dots. He does a double-take, rubs his eyes, and positions himself to get a better perspective on this apparent object. He then realizes that it really is there and concludes that someone must be playing a practical joke on him. The actions he took upon seeing the elephant are all part of his implicit know-how as a perceiving agent. They enabled him to get a better purchase on what he was looking at. They were "error-reducing" moves.[60] Taylor believes that the same process is involved in practical reason. It is through *transitions* that we reason. The aim of practical reason is "to establish, not that some position is correct absolutely, but rather that some position is superior to some other. It is concerned, covertly or openly, implicitly or explicitly, with comparative propositions."[61] We show that one proposition constitutes an "epistemic gain" over another by resolving a contradiction or confusion or by bringing to light some unacknowledged factor.[62] Taylor provides a few examples of this form of reasoning as it exists in its original form, biographical narrative.

> Joe was previously uncertain whether he loved Anne, because he also resents her, and in a confused way he was assuming that love is incompatible with resentment. But now he sees that these two are distinct and compatible emotions, and the latter is no longer getting in the way of his recognizing the strength of the former. Joe is confident that his present self-reading (I certainly love Anne) is superior to his former self-reading (I'm not sure whether I love Anne), because he knows that he passed from one to the other via the clarification of a confusion—a move that in its very nature is error-reducing.[63]

Another example considers Pete who was causing all sorts of problems and strife at home, largely because he felt that he was not getting his due as the eldest, that something was owed to him. But in the course of discussions with his parents and social workers and through some self-examination, he came to realize that his behaviour was unjustified. There was a gain in moral insight here, achieved through a set of transitions. "He's [Pete] confident that his change represents moral growth, because it came about through dissipating a confused, largely unconsciously held belief, one that couldn't survive his recognizing its real nature."[64] Although the argument is presented in a biographical form

here, as something that is individually generated, Taylor believes it is adaptable to interpersonal situations. This is evident in the case where the parents or social worker help Pete make the "self-justifying transition" involved.[65]

This process draws on the background of strong evaluations and intuitions that is so central to moral agency. In fact, it operates on and in it, just as in the case of perception where we have make moves to get a better purchase on our object. "The idea that we ought to prescind altogether from this background confidence of purchase is as unjustified as the corresponding demand in the moral field that we step outside moral intuitions."[66] Our strong evaluations, and the moral intuitions they build on, are what give us our sense of orientation in moral space. This is why, far from doing without them, greater articulacy about them enables us to "see" better in this space, to find our way around better. And transitions and error-reducing moves facilitate this self-clarity. All this is absent from the apodictic model.

> The bad model of practical reasoning, rooted in the epistemological tradition, constantly nudges us towards a mistrust of transition argument. It wants us to look for 'criteria' to decide the issue, i.e., some considerations which could be established even outside the perspectives in dispute and which would nevertheless be decisive. But there cannot be such considerations. My perspective is defined by the moral intuitions I have, by what I am morally moved by. If I abstract from this, I become incapable of understanding any moral argument at all.[67]

Thus the model Taylor is proposing is rooted in our moral phenomenology, in our moral intuitions. It seeks to come to terms with the way people actually live their lives. Rather than imposing a model of practical reason foreign to real experience, it seeks to build on the one that is implicit in that experience and which would figure in the best account of human agency we could offer.

Another important form of practical reason we should mention here that is also missing from the apodictic model but which plays no less significant a role in actual moral experience is what Taylor calls, after Aristotle, *phronesis*.[68] In the life of every individual, there will always be a "diversity of goods"[69] that make competing claims on him or her, goods such as financial success, artistic expression, family love, sexual fulfilment, rational mastery, etc. *Phronesis* is the form of reasoning involved in trying to balance these goods and virtues and to combine them into some coherent order in the course of one's life.[70] Contemporary moral theory unifies the moral domain into issues

of the right, hiding from view this diversity.[71] Its procedures do little to help us in this domain. On this broader view, reasonableness, as it figures in Habermas' theory, is one among many goods we try to realize in our lives. The problem here is how to combine these goods in our lives.

> We have to do here with a central area of moral problems which focuses on weighing up the often mutually competing claims of the different virtues against one another and bringing about a uniform, consistent form of life. Questions of precisely such a kind belong at the centre of moral life; it would therefore be completely arbitrary and unfounded simply to exclude this whole area by adhering to the false thesis that only virtues oriented toward charity have a moral character.[72]

Here too, we see the relationship between practical reason and articulacy. Weighing the diversity of goods in our lives requires the ability to talk about what is good in these goods. *Phronesis* is thus also a key element of moral agency.

Conclusion: moral articulacy and constitutive goods

Taylor's critique of contemporary moral theory attacks it from two fronts. The first has to do with its narrowing or foreshortening of the moral domain to include only those issues which have to do with "the right", i.e., how we treat other human beings. Taylor argues that such a foreshortening leaves out a constitutive part of human morality: "the good", i.e., what gives meaning to human life. What is more, by failing to capture the fullness of human moral existence in their theories, contemporary moral theorists undercut the very source from which people derive the motivation to follow the norms their theories generate. The question, "Why should I be moral?" is either inadequately dealt with or simply goes unanswered.

The second line of attack targets the conception of practical reason implicit in these theories. Practical reason is conceived on an apodictic model, influenced by the epistemological tradition. The task such a model sets for practical reason is one that is impossible to meet. There is simply no way to argue someone over to morality from the ground up. Rather, practical reason builds on the inescapable background of strong evaluations that is a fundamental part of human agency. Taylor proposes in this regard an "ad hominem" mode of reasoning whose goal is to achieve greater moral self-clarity. Through a process involving comparative propositions and error-reducing transitions,

greater insight into this background is obtained. Moral articulacy is the outcome both here and in the other form of practical reasoning Taylor highlights, that of *phronesis*. The latter involves the activity of weighing up the mutually competing claims different goods make on us and combining them in some fashion over the course of the one life we have.

A common thread running through this whole discussion of contemporary moral theory is the importance of moral articulacy. Taylor is convinced that greater articulacy about the various contexts that enable our moral agency is the key to greater understanding. Here we return to the very beginning of chapter one. There we asked three questions: 1) "How are we to understand human agency?" 2) "What is it to be human?" 3) "How should human beings live?" In the course of this thesis, we have seen these questions applied in particular to the domain of moral agency. Chapter one set out the approach and method according to which Taylor believes human agency is best studied: a hermeneutical-phenomenological method whose aim is to uncover the inescapable structures of human agency. Chapter two saw the application of that method to the domain of moral experience. There we elaborated the various structures that are constitutive of moral, and human, agency and map its background context. In many ways, this chapter answered the second question. In brief, to be human is to exist in a space of ethical questions about what it is good to be/love/do and to have answers to these questions, implicit or explicit, dialogically or monologically generated. These answers form the background context out of which we are able to define who we are and where we stand. But such answers require strong evaluation. To be human, then, is to be capable of strong evaluation.

And now chapter three has helped us answer the third question. Taylor is not concerned with plugging his own bag of goods according to which he believes we should all live. On the contrary, his *Sources of the Self* is devoted precisely to fighting any such narrow definitions of the modern identity.

> To see the full complexity and richness of the modern identity is to see, first, how much we are all caught up in it, for all our attempts to repudiate it; and second, how shallow and partial are the one-sided judgements we bandy around about it.[73]

Rather than siding with the knockers or the boosters of the modern identity, Taylor undertakes to articulate what he believes are some of the central goods of that identity: artistic expression, the life of family and work, rational mastery. He mines the history of the West in order to retrieve and uncover some of the moral sources that gave these goods their power and appeal. The two objects of this retrieval in his case are philosophy and literature. But the list of possible moral sources extends far beyond this.[74] The primary goal here is greater articulacy about the underlying goods that combine to make up the modern Western identity. *Sources of the Self* is a monumental example of the articulation of the background to human agency that Taylor believes is so important.

Only here we are no longer talking about the inescapable structures of human agency. Here the focus is very much on the West. And the goal is greater articulacy about who we are as modern Western individuals. Of course what this is changes everyday. The increased mobility of people around the world and the high degree of intercultural mixing and borrowing poses a challenge to any homogeneous conception of the "modern Western identity". Taylor is also aware of the sensitivity to the demands of 'extra-human' goods as embodied, for example, in environmentalism.[75] In many ways, however, Taylor is a *longue-durée* historian of identity. While these recent changes are important, to believe that they can undo the centuries of history that have gone into forming this identity is to have a short-sighted view of history and a shallow understanding of identity-formation. The goods that make up the modern identity have been a long time in the making and, while they will continue to develop, they are not going to go away anytime soon. Greater articulacy about these goods is thus an unmitigated good in Taylor's eyes.

It also gives us one way of answering the third question of "How should human beings live?" albeit from a Western perspective. In short, we should try to live more morally articulate lives.[76] The goods we are articulate about do not figure in this answer; they are the object of this articulation. To judge them beforehand would be to contradict the insight that people must draw on their own strong evaluations in order to make such judgements. To be sure, these goods can be argued about and discussed. Moral articulacy, however, is about striving for a certain measure of self-lucidity about the

strong evaluations that inform our position on these goods, both individually and collectively.

Greater moral articulacy is also vital in our current moral predicament. At the end of the twentieth century, we seem to be committed more than ever, at least in principle, to the most important hypergoods of modern Western culture: universal justice, benevolence, and freedom. Taylor believes that such a morally demanding commitment requires strong moral sources. Moral sources usually involve what Taylor calls "constitutive goods".[77] These are "features of ourselves, or the world, or God, such that their being what they are is essential to the life goods [and hypergoods] being good."[78] Traditional constitutive goods are Plato's Idea of the Good, God, or, for Aristotle, our being animals endowed with logos.[79] In the modern world, there is also room for constitutive goods. "In a modern humanistic ethic, the locus of the constitutive good is displaced onto the human being itself."[80] Taylor attributes our understanding of this modern constitutive good to Kant and his articulation of the dignity of rational agency.

> My claim is that something like this sense of dignity and value of human life, of the nobility of rational freedom, underpins the ethical consciousness of our contemporaries and plays the two roles we can see it occupying in Kant's philosophy: it defines why the human being commands our respect when she or he is the object of our action; and it sets us an ideal for our own action.[81]

Articulacy about the goods we are committed to must also extend to constitutive goods. This articulation does not only clarify what to be and do. In the case of constitutive goods it can also move and inspire us to value and believe in those goods.[82] The articulation of constitutive goods helps us to see more clearly why we are in fact committed to the hypergoods of modern culture.

By setting out for us some of the goods we value in the modern identity, *Sources of the Self* contributes to a fuller understanding of the modern constitutive good outlined above. For these goods are associated with human powers/capacities, an intrinsic part of the modern constitutive good which recognizes that "we are in some way *moved* by human powers."[83] *Sources* traces the history and development of three goods we associate with the modern identity: our capacity for artistic expression, both as artist and audience, associated with Romanticism; our capacity for human love and relationships, associated with the Reformation affirmation of ordinary life; and our capacity for rational

mastery, associated with the Enlightenment. But this process of retrieval is not an easy one.

> The kind of study I have embarked on here can be a work, we might say, of liberation. The intuition which inspired it, which I have recurred to, is simply that we tend in our culture to stifle the spirit. We do this partly out of the prudence I have just invoked [to scale down our hopes and ideals, i.e., commitment to modern hypergoods], particularly after the terrible experiences of millenarist destruction of our century; partly because of the bent of modern naturalism [and epistemology], one of our dominant creeds; partly because of partisan narrowness all around. We have read so many goods out of our official story, we have buried their power so deep beneath layers of philosophical rationale, that they are in danger of stifling. Or rather, since they are our goods, human goods, *we* are stifling.
>
> The intention of this work was one of retrieval, an attempt to uncover buried goods through rearticulation—and thereby to make these sources again empower, to bring the air back again into the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit.[84]

In the same way, we have seen in this thesis how, through a concerted effort at overcoming the limits and narrowness of epistemology and the distorted picture of human agency that has grown up around it, Taylor has managed to provide us with a compelling alternative picture of our moral selves. It is a picture that he sincerely believes does greater justice to all that we are as human beings. And it is a picture which he believes gives us a better grasp of what is needed for us to flourish.

As important as this picture is, however, it is still incomplete, for human flourishing is not only about individuals. It is certainly true, as has been seen repeatedly in this chapter, that the context of our moral agency, complete with lifegoods, hypergoods, and constitutive goods and their interplay, is central to an accurate moral self-understanding, a context Taylor finds missing in contemporary moral theory. But at the same time, communities are not only there to serves as the webs within which we learn about these goods. Communities themselves can share goods and have a shared way of life. To be sure, any understanding of how this occurs would have to take seriously the realities of individualism, secularization, and multiculturalism that ostensibly threaten it. Taylor, however, is confident that this background context of common goods and a common way of life is still central to an understanding of politics, even in the Western setting. Once again, however, it is a context he finds largely absent from mainstream political theory. In the next chapter, we will examine how the content-

context distinction plays itself out in Taylor's analysis and critique of contemporary political theory.

IV: PROCEDURALISM AND CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THEORY

Traditionally, moral and political theory are seen as closely connected, even mutually dependent. The question of which comes first in the order of explanation in any account of social reality is very much an open one. It would be impossible to pin Taylor down on this point since his ideas on the matter point in both directions. For example, he is fully on side with Hegel in according the life of the community primacy in the development of individual identity. Humans can only become agents, interlocutors, and citizens within the context of this larger social and political life. In contrast, however, as we saw in chapter two, Taylor also believes that there are inescapable structures of human agency, such as strong evaluation, that in certain respects precede the particulars of community and culture.

For our purposes here, however, it is sufficient to note that the connections between moral and political theory are such that paradigms or models current in one can influence those adopted in the other. Taylor in fact wants to maintain some such thesis in the case of proceduralism in moral theory. "An influential trend in contemporary thought has been to apply this proceduralist move to political theory, as distinct from ethics, to try to develop norms of social justice or fairness, norms governing the coercive actions of political authorities."[1] In this chapter, we will examine different ways in which proceduralism has shaped contemporary political theory and Taylor's assessment and critique of them. We will begin with neutral liberalism and then move to political conceptions of justice and rights. Taylor's critique of the former involves both the claim that neutrality is untenable in practice and that its atomist prejudices fail to understand the importance of patriotism. His critique of the second amounts to an invocation of what I will call "political phronesis", that is, the view that there are more political goods than justice alone. He also points to the existence of more than one conception of justice. Taylor is not insensitive to the importance of justice and rights and their political embodiment. He is, however, concerned about how this embodiment can be grounded and justified. In this regard, we will look at his different responses to the project of Rawls' *Political Liberalism* and Habermas' *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, in particular, his arguments in favour of Rawls' 'overlapping consensus' model

over Habermas' discourse ethics. Now it is clear that Rawls and Habermas are not just two different thinkers whose projects are identical, for there are important differences in their projects. At the same time, however, their concerns overlap to a certain degree, and it is on the basis of this overlap that they may be compared. Both theorists, for example, are interested in the issue of justice and conflict resolution at the social and political level. Rawls' theory, however, with its notion of the overlapping consensus, respects the "reasonable comprehensive doctrines" in which justice and rights are embedded to a greater degree than does Habermas, who, while admitting the importance of the lifeworld, grounds his discourse ethics in an "acultural"[2] theory of modernity.

All of the criticisms we will consider in this chapter of the various guises of proceduralism in political theory bring us back to the central theme in Taylor's thought that I have been arguing best characterizes his philosophy as a whole: the importance of context. In chapter one, it was the context of human beings' engagement with their world, their practices and dealing with things that was highlighted in order better to understand the nature of agency and knowledge. In chapters two and three, the context of an individual's strong evaluations and placement in moral space and the context of the webs of interlocution and communities in which moral languages are learned were both seen as fundamental to any conception of the right. Building on this analysis, in this chapter we will see how Taylor emphasizes the social and cultural context and its importance in the framing of political theories.

Procedural liberalism I: neutrality and policy normativity

The importation, so to speak, of proceduralism into political theory from moral theory led to a form of liberalism that Taylor calls "procedural"[3] and which is often also called more specifically "neutral liberalism". Taylor associates this view with theorists such as Ronald Dworkin, Robert Nozick, and John Rawls (chiefly in his *A Theory of Justice*).[4] Procedural liberalism recognizes that individuals will have conceptions of the good that guide them in their lives and moral choices.[5] However, it maintains that these conceptions cannot be endorsed in any way by the state. For example, a state cannot take a position on religious affairs and favour say, Protestantism over Roman Catholicism, either explicitly or implicitly, such as through grants provided for the building of

Protestant churches that Catholics are denied. The state must remain neutral on substantive issues such as these and strive rather to secure conditions under which different conceptions of the good may be pursued, so long as their pursuit does not adversely affect other people.

> [A] liberal society should not be founded on any particular notion of the good life. The ethic central to a liberal society is an ethic of the right rather than the good. That is, its basic principles concern how society should respond to and arbitrate the competing demands of individuals. These principles would obviously include the respect of individual rights and freedoms, but central to any set that could be called liberal would be the principal of maximal and equal facilitation. This does not in the first instance define what goods the society will further, but rather how it will determine the goods to be advanced, given the aspirations and demands of its component individuals. What is crucial are the procedures of decision, which is why I want to call this brand of liberal theory "procedural".[6]

Closely bound up with the aspiration to neutrality of this family of liberal theories are some of the motives behind modern moral theory we examined in the last chapter. For example, the respect for people's ability and right to determine their own vision of the good life plays an important role here. Behind this respect, Taylor claims, is the modern view which sees human dignity as consisting largely in autonomy.[7] It is this ideal of autonomy that underlies in part the principle of neutrality. Given that this ideal is very much a Western one these theories may be criticized, ironically, for being ethnocentric.[8]

Beyond this, however, the principle of neutrality, and by extension, principles of fairness and equality, are taken to stand as the appropriate basis of a (Western) liberal society. "A liberal society must remain neutral on the good life and restrict itself to ensuring that, however they see things, citizens deal fairly with one another and the state deals equally with all."[9] What these principles consist in exactly and how they are both grounded and generated is an important consideration. Before turning to this, however, we should consider one obvious criticism of the ideal of neutrality itself qua political principle.

Right at the beginning of chapter one, we broached the topic of theory and normativity. There we explored Taylor's arguments against the possibility of value-free theory in political science. Any theory, he claims, will always have its own built-in value slope which favours certain outcomes over others. A similar argument can be made here

in the case of neutral liberalism. Whenever a government makes decisions about the allocation of resources, for example, it is bound to promote certain interests or goods and not others. Taylor provides a particular example relating to the dilemma parents face in balancing work and raising children. One possibility is to provide more day-care. But what about those people who want to spend more time caring for their children themselves? In this case, we could try to effect basic changes such as reducing the work week, allowing extended parental leaves, temporary part-time work periods, etc.[10]

> How do we decide which direction to go in? Of course, the fact that many people want to take care of their children longer, if I'm right about this, is a relevant consideration. But I cannot believe that our thoughts about what is a good pattern of life, both for the fulfilment of parents, and for the well-being of children is not going to enter our decision making here. We can't give people everything they want when it comes to social spending. We have to make judgements about the relative weight and worth of different demands. And yet we are here in the midst of one those controversial issues about modes of family life which has been put on the agenda of our society.[11]

Whatever policy is finally adopted, it cannot but be normative. There is more to political deliberation than what the principle of neutrality allows. "Neutral liberalism as a total principle seems to me here a formula for paralysis; or else hypocrisy, if one tried to occlude the real reasons. It is at this point that it begins to appear more than costly; in truth, inapplicable."[12]

The problem then is not the aspiration to neutrality per se, but the aspiration to total neutrality. In the case of religion, mentioned above, neutrality is surely the only just policy. But to conceive of government as a neutral arbiter in all affairs is to misconceive the role of government and to blind oneself to the extent to which it is an expression of the social reality in which it is embedded. The very act of formulating a definite policy in the allocation of resources necessarily entails that not all interests can be served. The law too, cannot always be neutral. The illegality of same-sex marriages or even simply same-sex benefits is a case in point. For some, this is a continued sign of the heterosexual prejudices of our society. In this case, neutrality is precisely what is being sought after by gay activists, or, on another reading, it is the recognition legality entails that this is a valid and equally good mode of life in society's eyes. Here we see neutral liberalism coming up against its limits, for in the debate on the politics of difference it can only

support one of the two attitudes Taylor identifies in "The Politics of Recognition". That is, neutral liberalism is able to embrace difference-blindness—the view that all should be treated the same despite differences of, for example, ethnicity or sexual orientation. However, it is unable to cope with the demands for explicit recognition that social groups may make that they believe are essential to their well-being or even survival, for this contradicts the very aspiration to neutrality on conceptions of the good life. We will return to the issue of recognition later when we look at the idea of "political phronesis".

Procedural liberalism II: atomism and patriotism

We would do well at this point, however, to inquire more deeply into the basis of the principle of neutrality. Above, we saw that the modern notion of autonomy underlies it. There is, however, another source that is closely connected to the notion of autonomy, but which develops it further into an understanding of society: political atomism.[13] Taylor traces this view back to the social contract theories of Hobbes and Locke which involved "a vision of society as in some sense constituted by individuals for the fulfilment of ends which were primarily individual".[14] Referring to contemporary political theory, Taylor provides a definition of the beliefs associated with atomism.

> They believe that in (a), the order of explanation, you can and ought to account for social actions, structures, and conditions in terms of properties of the constituent individuals; and in (b) the order of deliberation, you can and ought to account for social goods in terms of concatenations of individual goods.[15]

In conceiving of society in a radically individualistic manner, atomism provides a basis for the defence of neutrality among conceptions of the good and for the primacy of individual rights. The government assumes the role of referee or arbiter, having been established for this purpose on the basis of individuals' converging enlightened self-interest. The story is a familiar one to students of political theory.

Now Taylor wants to maintain that atomistic notions underlie contemporary theories of procedural liberalism. A good example can be found in Rawls' difference principle as set forth in *A Theory of Justice*. Taylor summarizes this as involving "treating the endowment of each as part of the jointly held resources for the benefit of society as a whole."[16] Rawls argues that under the "veil of ignorance" in the "original position", people will choose to follow the difference principle according to which "[a]ll

social primary goods—liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any or all of these goods is to the advantage of the least favored."[17] Taylor's problem is not so much with the difference principle as with the way it is generated. Rawls' veil of ignorance and original position combine to create a situation in which individuals reflect on principles of justice prior to socialization and prior to knowledge of their status in society. Rawls puts it in the following way:

> The idea of the original position is to set up a fair procedure so that any principles agreed to will be just. The aim is to use the notion of pure procedural justice as a basis of theory. Somehow we must nullify the effects of specific contingencies which put men at odds and tempt them to exploit social and natural circumstances to their own advantage. Now in order to do this I assume parties are situated behind a veil of ignorance. They do not know how the various alternatives will affect their own particular case and they are obliged to evaluate principles solely on the basis of general considerations.[18]

Now the ideal of striving to transcend one's selfish interests that is built into the concepts of the veil of ignorance and the original position is not the real problem here. Rather, it is the more radical notion that these concepts in fact presuppose, that of "unencumbered selves".[19] Taylor draws on Michael Sandel here when he points out that the difference principle "presupposes a high degree of solidarity among the participants ... [a] sense of mutual commitment [that] could be sustained only by encumbered selves who share a strong sense of community."[20] But Rawls' theory precludes this possibility. It is in line with atomistic assumptions insofar as its contractors are portrayed as "mutually indifferent".[21] Their agreement on the difference principle is based on reflection that is both highly individual and highly abstract.

This example provides a good way of depicting Taylor's second criticism of procedural liberalism and its principle of neutrality. Just as the original position and veil of ignorance of Rawls' theory is criticized by Taylor, following Sandel, for rendering impossible a convincing account of the generation of the difference principle, so Taylor also wants to charge procedural liberalism with undercutting the very source of its continued strength, namely, patriotism. The root of the problem, as we will see, is the atomist ontology that Taylor believes underlies procedural liberalism. Here he distinguishes between two issues: ontology and advocacy issues, the former referring to

the nature of human agency and society, the latter to explicit policy.[22] Taylor opens up the problem he sees by asking about the "viability" of a society based on procedural liberalism.[23] He argues that while in a despotism, coercion is the basis of its functioning and order, in a free society, something else must replace coercion. In the civic-humanist tradition, "this can only be a willing identification with the polis on the part of the citizens" where they see "political institutions" as "an expression of themselves" and the "laws" as "extensions of themselves".[24] This identification is at the heart of (modern) patriotism for Taylor. What is more, it is a *common* identification. "[P]atriotism is based on an identification with others in a particular common enterprise."[25]

This feature of commonality Taylor claims has no place in procedural liberalism with its atomistic assumptions. And yet it is constitutive of our social relations and way of life. Taylor provides examples of "irreducibly common action" in our lives, an obvious one being a conversation between two people in which a common space is opened up. Here something such as the weather goes from being for-you-and-for-me, via conversing about it, to being a matter for *us*. Other examples include dancing and even two people sawing a log.[26] The distinction Taylor is trying to depict here is between the monological and the dialogical. This applies equally to goods and leads to the related distinction between merely convergent goods and common goods. A police force or fire department are examples of convergent goods since what they provide is a good for every individual on her/his own.[27] A common good, however, is good because it is a good for us together. And it is the sense of sharing a common good that animates republics.[28]

> Patriotism is somewhere between friendship or family feeling, on one side, and altruistic dedication on the other. The latter has no concern for the particular: I'm inclined to act for the good of anyone anywhere. The former attaches me to a particular people. My patriotic allegiance doesn't bind me to individual people in this familiar way; I may not know most of my compatriots, and may not particularly want them as friends when I do meet them. But particularity enters in because my bond to these people passes through our participation in a common political entity. Functioning republics are like families in this crucial respect, that part of what binds people together is their common history.[29]

Thus Taylor comes down in favour of what he calls "the republican thesis". This holds that "the essential condition of a free (nondespotic) regime is that the citizens have a deeper patriotic identification."[30] This identification would be based on citizens seeing

themselves as sharing with others common goods embodied in the political regime of which they are all members.

Taylor recognizes that a liberal might respond in one of two ways here. The first response would be to argue that this republican thesis no longer applies in "modern mass bureaucratic society" where individualism reigns. Other bases for liberal societies must suffice, such as enlightened self-interest or that the "liberal ethos" is widespread and deep enough that citizens will stand by it.[31] But Taylor does not believe this is enough. For one thing, it fails to explain recent history. The public outrage at the Watergate scandal is inexplicable in atomist terms. Only patriotic identification could have generated such a reaction.[32] Taylor evokes the sense of an "American way of life" and a common history with its ideals embodied in documents such as the Declaration of Independence to account for the existence of a shared American identity that made itself felt in so striking a fashion during Watergate.[33] Taylor reaffirms the continued relevance of the republican thesis:

> Pure enlightened self-interest will never move enough people strongly enough to constitute a real threat to potential despots and putschists. Nor will there be enough people who are moved by universal principle, unalloyed with particular identifications, moral citizens of the cosmopolis, Stoic or Kantian, to stop these miscreants in their tracks. [...] Not only has patriotism been an important bulwark of freedom in the past, but it will remain unsubstitutably so for the future.
>
> In short, we need patriotism as well as cosmopolitanism because modern democratic states are extremely exigent common enterprises in self-rule. They require a great deal of their members, demanding much greater solidarity toward compatriots than toward humanity in general. We cannot make a success of these enterprises without strong common identification.[34]

The liberal, however, could acknowledge the importance of patriotism and respond differently to the charge of non-viability. Instead, she could argue that her procedural liberalism rests on not an atomistic but a holistic ontology ("holism" here being a view that recognizes the constitutive role of community and the dialogical in the development of human identity, and by extension, the reality of common goods). That is, she recognizes that some form of common identification is needed in order for a liberal society to be able to sustain itself, and where an atomist ontology would preclude this possibility, her holism embraces it. So far so good. She wants to maintain, however, that

the common good here is the rule of right, of which the principle of neutrality is an intrinsic part.[35]

This leads Taylor into a discussion of two models of citizenship, one which sees the citizen as a possessor of rights to be guarded and secured through mechanisms such as judicial retrieval, and one which sees "participation in self-rule as the essence of freedom."[36] The question he considers in this discussion is which model "can figure in the definition of citizen dignity in a viable patriotism."[37] Can a commitment to the rule of right alone suffice? Taylor does not provide a definitive answer, arguing that the question must be "particularized to each society's tradition and culture".[38] But he does note that within the confines of procedural liberalism, the very issue he is posing is not even tabled.

> But procedural liberals seems quite unaware that the issue has to be addressed. Could it be that they are still too much in the thrall of atomist notions, of the instrumental model of society, or of the various atomist sources of allegiance, to see that there are questions here? Are they too insensitive to the ontological issues to see the point of the republican critique? I suspect this is so. And thus they fail to articulate the distinction between ontological [atomism vs. holism] and advocacy [liberalism vs. communitarianism] questions, and take their communitarian critics to be simply advancing a different *policy*, which they vaguely apprehend as more collectivist; instead of seeing how the challenge is based on a redrawn map of political possibilities.[39]

By putting into relief the importance of ontological issues and the role they play in informing one's advocacy of, for example, procedural liberalism, Taylor alerts us to the dangers of evaluating political policies and philosophies in abstraction from the social context of which they are a part. The abstractness of liberal theories themselves often misleads us into believing them to be based on universals or to be universally applicable. While this may blind us to the ontologies on which they are based, it may also be the case the these ontologies are so familiar that we hardly even think to detect their presence. Taylor's point then becomes more explicitly hortatory. We need to think about these ontologies. We need to articulate what we are implicitly claiming about the nature of human agency and society when we subscribe to certain philosophies and policies and ask whether this is really an accurate portrayal, especially when these philosophies and policies just seem the obvious ones to adopt.

Procedural liberalism III: rights are not the only good; justice as plural

The example above of the procedural liberal with the holist ontology opens up another field of debate. Her response to the charge that procedural liberalism is non-viable because it does not allow for patriotism was to maintain that patriotism was possible and indeed important—citizens are united in their support of the rule of right. This becomes the common good around which they come together, as the Watergate scandal illustrates. This shifts our discussion of proceduralism in political theory from the procedural generation of things like the principle of neutrality and conceptions of rights and justice to the principles and conceptions themselves. To take a step back for a moment, proceduralism in political theory can mean two things: 1) the procedures for generating political principles/conceptions, and 2) the focus of such principles/conceptions on procedures. For example, Rawls' original position is a procedural construct for generating his difference principle. But then the difference principle itself focusses on the right procedure for securing justice. In the last section, we were concerned more with the problems associated with 1) in relation to procedural liberalism, especially its underlying atomistic assumptions. In this section, we move away from 1) to consider not so much 2) as the nature of these principles/conceptions qua political goods. Taylor's critique of 1) has actually led us in this direction. Political atomism has given way to holism, one could say. The shift comes in the tendency to see these principles/conceptions no longer as the product of a "purely procedural justice", but as elements in a wider conception of the good. It seems clear that something like this has happened in the recasting and reformulation of *A Theory of Justice* (1971) that went into Rawls' *Political Liberalism* (1993). Conceptions of justice are now understood to be a part of people's "reasonable comprehensive doctrines", that is, their wider conceptions of the good. The problem now becomes how to effect an agreement on a political conception of justice, to which Rawls' overlapping consensus provides an answer.

This criticism is in many ways focussed on the political counterpart of the narrowness of modern moral theory we encountered in the last chapter. Both involve according issues of the right a certain priority. We saw how this focus in moral meta-theory leads to a corresponding tendency in moral theory to construe issues of the right as really what morality is all about. This fails to come to terms with the complexity of our

moral phenomenology which situates this set of issues within their proper context. Insofar as the commitment to the "primacy of rights" is linked to a belief in political atomism, the same problem arises at the political level. Taylor's critique of atomism is very much reminiscent of his theory of moral phenomenology. For example, he links rights and freedoms (e.g., the freedoms of speech, religion, expression) to certain capacities that we recognize humans possess. But these capacities can only be developed and therefore only have meaning within a social and cultural context. This fact contradicts the very basis of atomism.[40] In the previous chapter, we briefly considered Taylor's reference to Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* and its importance in moral agency. Taylor's argument was that modern forms of practical reason often do not allow space for this concept. *Phronesis* involves balancing the demands that the full range of goods (e.g., reason, expression, love) make on us and combining these in some, ideally coherent, fashion. By narrowing the moral domain to issues of the right, modern moral theory blinds us to this real diversity of goods. Now Taylor sees very much the same problem occurring at the political level in political theories which focus almost exclusively on the rule of right. Neutral liberalism is once again a good case in point.

> For me, it is not a matter of branding neutrality between various life conceptions as something wrong in principle. Quite the contrary, it is clearly an important good, even indispensable, in certain contexts of the modern liberal state. For instance, these states are neutral between different religious confessions, and it is extremely important that they be so. [...]
>
> So much is agreed. Where I disagree is in the absolute pretensions of this kind of theory; the claim to have found *the* principle of liberal society; or the principle which ought to trump all others wherever they come into conflict. [...]
>
> That's (one of the many reasons) why I'm unhappy with the term 'communitarianism'. It sounds as though the critics of this liberalism wanted to substitute some other all-embracing principle, which would in some equal and opposite way exalt the life of the community over everything. Really the aim (as far as I'm concerned) is more modest: I just want to say that single-principle neutral liberalism can't suffice. That it has to allow for other goods with which it will have to compose, and put some water in its wine, on pain of our forgoing other very important things. Or perhaps the case might be put more strongly; perhaps the integral realisation only of this principle verges on the impossible.[41]

Taylor is calling for here what I would like to call "political phronesis". While ideals of neutrality and justice may be political goods in their own right, they don't exhaust the possibilities. This is true in at least two ways.

First, there may be other common goods around which citizens rally in support. Such a good was hinted at in Taylor's evocation of the "American way of life" in the last section. Patriotism may involve the collective commitment to the rule of right and identification with the institutions we most commonly associate with it such as voting, representative government, etc. But it can also involve something more substantive than this. The example of Quebec illustrates this well. The preservation and promotion of Québécois culture is understood as a good by both the government of Quebec and most of Quebec's inhabitants. This flatly contradicts the principle of neutrality since it is openly recognized that the government could not be neutral on the issue of Quebec identity.[42] But this does not mean that Quebec is not a liberal society, only that it opts for a different model of what this means. Rather than issues of rights or justice holding sway all the time, these must be balanced with the good of the preservation of Québécois culture. This requires the distinction between rights that can never be infringed and rights that can be restricted in the name of this other common good.[43] Quebec's language law is a good example of the latter.

> A society with strong collective goals can be liberal, on this view, provided it is also capable of respecting diversity, especially when dealing with those who don't share its common goals; and provided it can offer adequate safeguards for fundamental rights. There will undoubtedly be tensions and difficulties in pursuing these objectives together, but such pursuit is not impossible, and the problems are not in principle greater than those encountered by any liberal society that has to combine, for example, liberty and equality, or prosperity and justice.[44]

Taylor believes that a major source of the constitutional woes of Canada is the conflict between the two models of liberal society adopted in English Canada and Quebec. The model in English Canada is a form of procedural liberalism, a "liberalism of rights" which "(a) insists on uniform application of the rules defining these rights, without exception, and (b) [...] is suspicious of collective goals."[45] The model in Quebec, in contrast, is a liberalism that both respects individual rights and makes room for collective goals; it is aware of the need to balance the two. Here the "politics of equal respect" meets the "politics of difference" and is unable to respond the demands of the latter. Compromises on rights are not allowed. Rights are always the ultimate and overriding good, trumping everything in the final analysis. Political phronesis goes by the wayside.

The second way in which conceptions of justice don't exhaust the range of political goods has to do with the very fact that there is more than one conception of justice. Iris Marion Young's *Justice and the Politics of Difference* argued this point from one angle. In "Justice After Virtue", Taylor takes this point in another direction. There he contrasts Rawls' conception of justice (recall the discussion of the difference principle above) in *A Theory of Justice* with Aristotle's.[46] For Aristotle, society is based on common goods, the achievement of which every citizen is called on to participate in. A good example Taylor provides here is the defense of the homeland. Surely not everyone will contribute to this equally. The differential contributions people make to the achievement of common goods results in a mutual indebtedness that may not be entirely reciprocal. The example of the awarding of medals for valour in service, for example, illustrates the operation of this conception of justice in our own society.[47]

Taylor's point is that this alternative model of justice does not thereby render invalid Rawls' model. Rather, it simply demonstrates the need for the more than one model, the choice of which one to use among them depending on the circumstances. "The fact that this possibility doesn't even cross some people's minds is another consequence of this mistaken modern meta-ethics. A procedural ethics of rules cannot cope with the prospect that the sources of good might be plural."[48] A potential conflict between the two also interestingly demonstrates the relationship of the good to the right. Taylor depicts a situation for us in which one individual has risked and sacrificed much more than anyone else for the sake of a common good. Rawls' conception of justice would, in this case, call for distribution "TD" of the goods in our society while the Aristotelian model, based on mutual indebtedness, would call for distribution "MD".[49] The problem here is that TD doesn't recognize the claims of this extraordinary individual, and this could be considered an injustice.

> The notion that this is not so, that TD's being a good, indeed the highest possible distribution, must mean that MD has no claim on us; this notion comes from what I have argued is a mistaken meta-ethics. If the right were prior to the good, if the rules of right were derived from the application of the correct procedure, then two incompatible principles couldn't be generated, unless of course they were ranked, "lexicographically ordered", as Rawls puts it. But my case has been that this is a confused account, that the good is after all fundamental. And put this way there is no difficulty in principle in admitting that both TD and MD are valid. The fact that living up to the highest in us involves living by TD establishes its claim. But

> this by itself does nothing to deny that collaborators for a common good generate asymmetric relations of mutual indebtedness, and that these create legitimate expectations that the distribution conforms to MD.[50]

Not only does Taylor's argument here point to a plurality of conceptions of justice, it also shows how these conceptions are in turn related to people's own conception of the good, in particular, the common goods a commitment to which they share with others in society that in turn is partly constitutive of the society itself. The Rawls of *A Theory of Justice*, however, has given way to the Rawls of *Political Liberalism*. In this latter book, Rawls has fundamentally changed his position. Rather than arguing for his conception of justice as fairness as *the* conception for a truly liberal society, he presents it as his best candidate for a political conception of justice that would be the result of an "overlapping consensus" of people's "reasonable comprehensive doctrines". We will examine this idea and more generally the issue of the proper foundations for political conceptions of rights/justice in the contemporary world in the following section.

Justice in the contemporary world

We have now considered most of Taylor's arguments against the claims of procedural liberalism to neutrality on issues of the good life and to treating justice as the only political good. As has been mentioned earlier, however, Taylor does not reject outright the belief that justice and rights must be given some priority politically. Nor, for that matter, does he object to this morally speaking. His complaints issue more from the grounds on which this priority is justified. In the moral domain, his key point is that our conceptions of what is right are always couched in a larger conception of the good, and it is this conception that gives them their force and meaning. At the political level, it is no longer an individual human agent with a complex moral phenomenology that has an idea of justice, it is an abstract entity: a government or the body politic. Thus Taylor writes:

> [I]t is quite possible to be strongly in favour of a morality based on a notion of the good but lean to some procedural formula when it comes to the principles of politics. There is a lot to be said for this, precisely for the sake of certain substantive goods, e.g., liberty and respect for the dignity of all participants. Procedural norms have certainly been one of the crucial arms of liberal democracy.[51]

Although Taylor thus admits that the "political issue is, indeed, quite distinct from the that of the nature of moral theory",[52] he does not believe proceduralism is enough, as we have already seen. "If in the end I cannot quite agree with some such procedural view as the sufficient definition of the principles of liberal democracy, this is not because I don't see its force."[53]

Following this, we might say then that justice as a political issue is not the same issue as justice as a moral issue. Taylor recognizes that there is a difference here. Nevertheless, the grounds for justice qua political principle are no less important. There seem to be three ways one can proceed in this matter. The first harks back to the civic-humanist tradition and the "republican thesis". Here the analogy with the grounds for the priority of justice in the moral domain is close. Citizens would value justice as a fundamental element in their vision of the common good. This vision would involve seeing the institutions and laws as expressions of themselves which they can therefore identify with and participate in. So on this reading, justice is understood against the background of a collective vision of the good. Taylor's ideas on patriotism point to his belief in the enduring importance of this tradition, albeit in a suitably modified form. Just as Hegel believed we could not return to the glorious era of the Greeks in which identification with the polis was virtually total, so Taylor has both built on and moved beyond Hegel to show how in an ever more individualistic and secularized world common (as opposed to convergent) goods are still a reality. Even the politics of difference, often portrayed as diametrically opposed to the ideals of community or a shared understanding of the good, only makes sense in the context of collective recognition.[54]

As important as this way of grounding justice as a political principle is, there are two others that are possible. The first is associated with John Rawls, the second with Jürgen Habermas. Taylor does not reject these in favour of the first way. Rather, although he by no means abandons the first way, he recognizes the validity of Rawls' theory. This recognition, I believe, indicates an important shift in emphasis in Taylor's philosophy. We will explore this shift and its implications in more detail after a brief overview of the relevant features of both Rawls' and Habermas' theories.

Rawls and the idea of an overlapping consensus

Rawls' *Political Liberalism* can be understood as an extended answer to an important question Rawls himself poses: "how is it possible for there to exist over time a just and stable society of free and equal citizens, who remain profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?"[55] Rawls calls these doctrines, collectively, "comprehensive doctrines". They are analogous to what we might term more familiarly, conceptions of the good. The project of *Political Liberalism* flows from an acute awareness of the diversity of comprehensive doctrines in the contemporary world. Indeed, such diversity or "reasonable pluralism" is the "natural outcome of the activities of human reason [hence 'reasonable pluralism' as opposed to 'pluralism'[56]] under enduring free institutions."[57] In light of this pluralism, Rawls asks how we can come to agree on a political conception of justice, now that a common comprehensive doctrine is an impossibility.[58] We cannot afford to leave this question unanswered and assume that a relatively harmonious *modus vivendi* [59] will just continue or come about, or worse, that "a just and well-ordered democratic society is not possible".[60] Some formulated political conception of justice is necessary and possible according to Rawls.

> We must start with the assumption that a reasonably just political society is possible, and for it to be possible, human beings must have a moral nature, not of course a perfect such nature, yet one that can understand, act on, and be sufficiently moved by a reasonable political conception of right and justice to support a society guided by its ideals and principles.[61]

To be moved by a political conception of justice, however, Rawls recognizes the need for this conception to be capable of having meaning for different people, given their different reasonable comprehensive doctrines. It is not that an abstract notion of justice is out of the question. Rather, this may be viewed as Rawls' acknowledgement of the close connections between justice and the good—"the political conception of justice, is itself a moral conception."[62] Thus, taking both pluralism and the need for a political conception seriously, Rawls proposes his idea of the "overlapping consensus" as a way to ground that conception and give it meaning for all.

> In such a consensus, the reasonable doctrines endorse the political conception, each from its own point of view. Social unity is based on a consensus on the political conception [...]

> All those who affirm the political conception start from within their own comprehensive view and draw on the religious, philosophical, and moral grounds it provides. The fact that people affirm the same political conception on those grounds does not make their affirming it any less religious, philosophical, or moral, as the case may be, since the grounds sincerely held determine the nature of their affirmation.[63]

Rawls' "justice as fairness" thus assumes the status of his best proposal for the political conception of justice on which an overlapping consensus might be possible.

This overlapping consensus does not just come about. Although Rawls admits the embedding of the political conception of justice in reasonable comprehensive doctrines, the conception itself is seen to depend in no way on any of these politically—it is "freestanding". "To use a current phrase, the political conception is a module, an essential constituent part, that fits into and can be supported by various reasonable comprehensive doctrines that endure in the society regulated by it."[64] But before reaching an overlapping consensus, the content of the political conception of justice is worked out as a "freestanding view".[65] This content is "expressed in terms of certain fundamental ideas seen as implicit in the public political culture of a democratic society."[66] The political is thus both separate from and tied to reasonable comprehensive doctrines in important ways.

The foregoing captures only a small part of Rawls' theory, leaving important questions unanswered (e.g., how is an overlapping consensus actually generated?). But this is already enough to provide a contrast to Habermas' discourse ethics. To be sure, both are concerned with largely the same set of issues here, whether we call them normative rightness, justice, or morality (on Habermas' reading of this term). They also accord primacy in their theories to the role of consensus. But the background to Habermas' theory is significantly different from Rawls', and this leads to important differences in the theories themselves.

Habermas' discourse ethics theory of justice

For one thing, Habermas' philosophical project is geared towards finding the universal conditions of knowledge and action.[67] Whereas Rawls' theory grows out of the social contract tradition and Kantianism, Habermas comes out of the Frankfurt School

and the critical theory tradition associated with Adorno and Horkheimer.[68] Like Rawls, however, Habermas is hopeful about the possibilities of a just and peaceful coexistence. He rejects the pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer and is committed to discovering a conception of reason that can withstand the profound critiques of modernity and the Enlightenment of the twentieth century.[69] Bound up with this project is his study of "communicative action" which may be defined as action (via speech acts) oriented towards understanding. A number of people engaged in a discussion trying to come to some agreement or consensus on a particular issue is a familiar example of communicative action. This activity, Habermas maintains, is present in some form in all cultures. "[T]here is no form of sociocultural life that is not at least implicitly geared to maintaining communicative action by means of argument, be the actual form of argumentation ever so rudimentary and the institutionalization of discursive consensus building ever so inchoate."[70] Habermas' project then is based on a universal conception of reason and the universal activity of communicative action.

Central to Habermas' understanding of modernity are the three validity spheres that characterize it: the objective sphere (e.g., science), the intersubjective sphere (e.g., politics), the subjective sphere (e.g., art). To each of these three spheres correspond three possible claims to validity that may be raised: claims to truth, rightness, and sincerity.[71] The focus here is on the intersubjective sphere and Habermas' corresponding theory of discourse ethics, as laid out in his *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, which is really more accurately called a discourse ethics theory of morality or justice.[72]

Discourse ethics originates in the need for a way to resolve a disrupted consensus in the intersubjective sphere. This is the sphere of rightness, or more specifically, the shared "world of legitimately ordered interpersonal relations."[73] It assumes the existence of the "lifeworld" as background. This is the realm of embedded norms and values, cultural givens, the locus of substantive sources for our identities—"the sphere of ethical life."[74] Habermas makes a distinction between two types of norms here that is foundational for his theory of discourse ethics.

> In the sphere of ethical life, questions of justice are posed only within the horizon of questions concerning the good life, questions which have *always already been answered*. Under the unrelenting moralizing gaze of the participant in discourse this totality has lost its quality of naïve acceptance, and the normative power of

> the factual has weakened. [...] Under this gaze the store of traditional norms has disintegrated into those norms that can be justified in terms of principles and those that operate only de facto. The fusion of validity and social acceptance that characterizes the lifeworld has disintegrated. With this, the practice of everyday life separates the component of the practical (into norms and values that can be subjected to the demands of strict moral justification) and into another component that cannot be moralized (a component that comprises the particular value orientations integrated to form individual and collective modes of life).[75]

Discourse ethics thus transcends the lifeworld, its scope limited to those practical norms which are rationally debatable, and hence "susceptible to consensus"[76], which can be embodied in a generalizable interest. The universalization principle formalizes this filtering process, acting "like a knife that makes razor-sharp cuts between evaluative statements and strictly normative ones, between the good and the just."[77] The participants in discourse rationally debate these normative statements in order to generate valid norms which must fulfill Principle (U):

> (U) *All* affected can accept the consequences and the side effects its *general* observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of *everyone's* interests (and these consequences are preferred to those of known alternative possibilities for regulation).[78]

In order to debate in this fashion, these participants have attained "the moral point of view" from which "moral questions can be judged *impartially*".[79] It is associated with the highest stage (stage 6) of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development. However, discourse ethics, and in particular Principle (U), are primarily based on the "pragmatic presuppositions" of discourse (logical, procedural, process), presuppositions we necessarily and universally make when our objective in using language is understanding. For example, participants must presuppose that "all external and internal coercion other than the force of the better argument" is ruled out.[80] Habermas' calls this elaboration of the pragmatic presuppositions of discourse the "transcendental-pragmatic" justification.[81]

The grounds for justice in a context of cultural pluralism

Even this brief consideration of the basics of Habermas' discourse ethics theory of justice is enough to demonstrate how it is different from Rawls' theory. While there are in fact many ways in which they may be compared and contrasted,[82] I am here concerned

with a specific issue: the relationship between the lifeworld/reasonable comprehensive doctrines/ethical life and justice/morality. How *practically* separable are these *philosophically* separated domains? Habermas' response to Rawls' idea of an overlapping consensus is clear. Comprehensive doctrines do not admit of considerations of truth in the same way that issues of justice or morality do—i.e., as "justifiable in the sense of rational acceptability"--and thus cannot serve as the basis for a conception of justice.[83] Rawls theory is still mired in the ethical.[84] Although discourse ethics relies on the lifeworld both for the substance of the norms it tests[85] and to render these norms socially acceptable once discursively justified,[86] its testing procedure is radically independent of the lifeworld. "Discourse ethics does not set up substantive orientations. Instead, it establishes a *procedure* based on presuppositions and designed to guarantee the impartiality of the process of judging."[87] Rawls' response is to argue that a political conception of justice can at the same time be both freestanding and endorsed by a particular reasonable comprehensive doctrine. Indeed, this justification through an overlapping consensus is essential to a "stability for the right reasons".[88] For Habermas, stability for the right reasons is obtained through the justification of an impartial procedure based on the universalization principle, itself in turn grounded in the universal presuppositions of discourse. To put the matter (perhaps a little too) simply, Rawls' justification for a political conception of justice centres on the overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines and thus depends on the ethical, while Habermas' justification for norms of justice/morality centres on discourse ethics, defined in terms independent of the ethical.

The terms of the debate now laid out, it can be stated right away that Taylor is not neutral on this issue. It was mentioned above that he sides with Rawls, and this should come as no surprise given his understanding of human agency. I also mentioned that I believe it indicates an important shift of emphasis in his philosophy. It is now time to unpack this claim. I believe this shift has to do with the fact of cultural pluralism, a fact that all three philosophers have had to grapple with.

In his own way, Taylor agrees with Rawls and Habermas in their according a priority, at the political and social level, to a set of issues. In lining up these three thinkers for comparison, I am thus claiming that there is something they have in common.

This commonality has to do with this "set of issues" and its special importance. It is important to be clear, however, as to how they differ from each other in defining this set of issues. We have seen how Rawls and Habermas differ in the foregoing discussion. Taylor, however, does not provide a clear statement of his position. This is because he does not believe the distinction between the two sets of issues, above characterized by the distinction lifeworld/reasonable comprehensive doctrines/ethical vs. justice/morality, can be made a priori. Taylor does acknowledge that there is certainly a sense of this distinction, a sense that there is a set of "core demands which are universal [and] are—or clearly should be—part of everyone's ethical outlook."[89]

> But, how to justify these attempts to define a core? Now I think that the wrong way to try is through some epistemological distinction: the core would be in some way more obvious, less contentious and open to dispute, than understandings of the good life. This kind of distinction is made, of course, by certain modern Western theories, notably Kantian ones: the rule of right can be distinguished from people's conceptions of happiness (Kant), or of the good life (Habermas), and given a different, more secure foundation (in reason itself, or the commitments involved in discourse, or whatever). But this distinction is internal to *one* historical view. One couldn't ask an Aristotelian of a Thomist, let alone people from other cultures altogether, to buy this radical distinction between the right and the good, or between definitions of rights and those of human flourishing.[90]

Taylor thus rejects the basis of Habermas' discourse ethics, that is, the distinction between the (rationally debatable) moral and the (lifeworld-bound) evaluative/ethical. Now there are different reasons Taylor gives for this rejection. In the last chapter, we considered reasons internal to the moral phenomenology of human beings: Habermas' theory fails to capture why we are or want to be moral in the first place. Another reason has to do with the terms in which we must think about justice, terms imposed on us by the contemporary world and the fact of cultural pluralism.

We might try to justify the rights/goods distinction from within the Western perspective, out of which it originates. This attempt is implicit in procedural liberalism, Taylor's critique of which we have examined. But, for many, the idea of a homogeneous Western culture is growing increasingly dubious. Add to this the tendencies of globalization and you find yourself having to think about justice in new terms. This is where I locate the shift in emphasis in Taylor's moral and political writings. Although he

is still very much involved in the debate on the right and the good within the Western perspective, he is also increasingly trying to articulate how an analogous debate would play itself out in the context of cultural pluralism.[91] His second critique of Habermas grows out of his understanding of this context.

Taylor's way of focussing on the set of issues relating to justice in the context of cultural pluralism is to speak in terms of human rights. This is somewhat narrower than Habermas' definition (i.e., all rationally debatable moral norms); however, this narrowness emerges from Taylor's understanding of cultural pluralism. In this context, he believes that Habermas' approach is the wrong one because it fails to acknowledge how much of that approach is specific to the modern West. Habermas' discourse ethics grows out of his theory of modernity. This theory posits the gradual delineation of the three validity spheres as a process inherent to modernization. This is, for Taylor, an example of an "acultural" theory of modernity. Whereas a "cultural" theory of modernity "characterizes the transformations which have issued in the modern West mainly in terms of the rise of a new culture", an acultural theory "describes these transformations in terms of some culture-neutral operation." For example, it speaks of "the growth in reason, defined in various ways: e.g., as the growth of scientific consciousness, or the development of a secular outlook, or the rise of instrumental rationality, or an everclearer distinction between fact-finding and evaluation."[92] Acultural theories of modernity might also conceive of the transformations negatively, in terms of something having been lost. Either way, there is an evaluative judgement built into the theory. Cultural theories do not depend on such judgements, describing the change rather "in terms of a contrast between constellations, before and after".[93] Taylor insists that this does not mean we must succumb to cultural relativism. "We don't need to agree with Cortés and the Conquistadores, and conclude that the Aztecs served the devil; we can come to a deeper and fairer understanding of what underlay their practice of human sacrifice, and still judge that it is well that the practice has ceased."[94] What a cultural approach opens to us is the possibility of a deeper understanding of other cultures, one which doesn't prejudge them negatively in terms of some Western-centric theory of modernity.

Taylor, "cultural phronesis", and a human rights consensus

Understanding historical change and cultural comparison is an important theme in Taylor's work.[95] What marks his writings in this area above all else is both the awareness he encourages of the profundity of cultural difference, as a means to overcoming ethnocentricity, and yet the hope for intercultural communication and understanding. The first point is captured in what might be called "cultural phronesis" (in line with [Aristotelian] phronesis and "political phronesis").

> We should be able to think about the conflicts between the requirements of incompatible cultures on analogy to the way we think about conflicts between nonjointly realizable goods in our lives.[...]
> The idea here is that what is true of a single life—that conflict doesn't invalidate or relativize the goods that clash, but on the contrary presupposes their validity—should hold for the opposition between cultures as well.[96]

At the same time, Taylor also wants to argue for a notion of potentiality in history which we cannot do without if we are to understand certain changes. He captures this with the idea of a "ratchet effect". This encompasses "changes that seem irreversible because those who go through them can't envisage reversing them, because they become standards for those who come after them".[97] Two such changes in the West involve rationality and universalism. Universal human rights are the prime example of the latter. They might offer a good basis on which to judge other cultures. For example, Taylor asks, "Wouldn't we welcome the discontinuance of suttee or human sacrifice?"[98] But, not all our cultural comparisons involve such issues. And in this respect, we need to allow for a plurality of cultures with different goods. Certain acultural theories of modernity will prejudge too many of these goods according to Western goods that are implicitly deemed higher or more developed.

Taylor's focus on human rights justice and not some broader conception is based on this understanding of cultural pluralism. Obviously, he rejects Habermas' claims to a universal, though dialogically conceived, principle for deciding such issues. Such a principle simply does not take cultural pluralism seriously enough. It tries to present, masquerading as universal, a procedure which is fundamentally Western in nature and based on Western notions (e.g., the distinction between rights and goods). Taylor sides with Rawls here in believing that conceptions of justice/rights must be rooted in the

ethical. Interestingly, however, Taylor's approach does not reject completely the idea of a "universal core of moral intuitions" a clarification of which Habermas believes is a task for moral theory.[99] For the path to agreeing on human rights in the context of cultural pluralism is to draw on the intuitions all cultures possess of the "importance of the human being".

> [In] our rejection of human sacrifice or—to take a less exotic example—of certain practices of subordinating women[, there is] the developed moral insight—that of the worth of each human being, the injunction that humans must be treated as ends, which we often formulate in a doctrine of universal rights. There is something very powerful in this insight just because it builds on a basic human reaction, which seems to be present in some form everywhere: that humans are especially important and demand special treatment. (I apologize for the vagueness in this formulation, but I'm gesturing as something that occurs in a vast variety of different cultural forms.)[100]

It is on the basis of the common occurrence of this reaction that agreement is possible. And one path to this agreement is via Rawls' "overlapping consensus".[101]

The great virtue of the idea of an overlapping consensus is that it takes cultural pluralism seriously and respects the different perspectives on justice associated with this pluralism. On Taylor's reading, Rawls' overlapping consensus can be recast to say:

> We all seem to share an intuition that these human immunities are of unique importance, although we articulate this in very different terms, and draw the boundaries of these immunities differently. Let's see if we can come to some agreement on these boundaries, each from within our own horizons.[102]

The above-mentioned shift in emphasis in Taylor's philosophy centres on this acknowledgement of the possibility of an overlapping consensus. This complements Taylor's more prominent focus in his writings on the understanding of historical change and cultural difference on "the goal [of] a common language, common human understanding, which would allow both us and them undistortively to be." In his discussion of the possibilities of reaching this goal, which I have space only to mention here, through "languages of contrast and comparison", and the attainment of a "fusion of horizons," Taylor draws inspiration from the work of Gadamer.[103] The acknowledgement of this possibility can be interpreted as an implicit admission on the part of Taylor of the depth of cultural difference and/or the practical (and, perhaps, urgent) need for agreement through consensus. The deeper the cultural difference, the

greater the difficulties associated with finding a common language, let alone achieving a fusion of horizons. An overlapping consensus is thus more practically workable.

An overlapping consensus, however, is itself no easy answer. For example, as Taylor cautions, we can't assume that a world consensus would be framed in the language of rights.[104] We would first need to separate out from this language, as far as this is possible, the cultural content that is specifically Western.

> For the Western rights tradition also carries certain views on human nature, society, and the human good that are elements of an underlying justification. [...] Many societies have held that it is good to ensure certain immunities or liberties to their members. [...] Everywhere it is wrong to take human life, at least under certain circumstances and for certain categories of persons. [...] But a quite different sense of the word is invoked when we start to [...] speak of "a right" or "rights". [...] This is to introduce what has been called "subjective rights." [...] [S]ubjective rights are not only crucial to the Western tradition; even more significant is the fact that they were projected onto Nature and formed the basis of a philosophical view of humans and their society, one that greatly privileges individuals' freedom and their right to consent to the arrangements under which they live.[105]

Some cultures may find the underlying philosophy of the human person and its implicit emphasis on autonomy to be in fundamental contradiction to their own philosophy or way of life. For example, in the West, a certain form of humanism often held to be the basis of human rights doctrine "stresses the importance of the human agent. It centers everything on him or her, makes his or her freedom and self-control a major value, something to be maximized."[106] In contrast to this, Taylor considers how this might fit with the Theravada Buddhist search for "selflessness, for self-giving, and *dana* (generosity)".[107] In searching for a "world consensus on certain norms of conduct, enforceable on governments", Taylor therefore sees the central question as being something along the lines of the following: "what variations can we imagine in philosophical justifications or in legal forms that would still be compatible with a meaningful universal consensus on what really matters to us, the enforceable norms?"[108] He then goes on, however, to depict a Buddhist reform movement in Thailand that is striving to rethink both Buddhist philosophy and the insights of the Western language of rights in order for the latter to be compatible with Buddhist ideas of *metta* (loving

kindness) and *karuna* (compassion).[109] This points to the conclusion that some consensus, amid the reality of cultural pluralism, might in fact be possible.

Taylor's exploration of the issue of justice in the contemporary world in this way also shows his position on the extent to which the cultural context must be taken seriously. A crucial difference between Rawls' notion of an overlapping consensus and Habermas' discourse ethics turns on their understanding of the meaning and implications of cultural pluralism. Habermas draws the distinction erroneously between the realm of the lifeworld and the realm of discourse ethics and the moral point of view. For the latter is merely the expression of a particular lifeworld culture, so to speak, that is, Western culture. For Taylor, the distinction is in fact of a different order. It involves distinguishing between those things that are particular to a certain culture and those things that are common to all cultures in some form and which can therefore be the proper object of an overlapping consensus, as understood by Taylor. Respecting cultural difference in the former case leads to an attitude of "cultural phronesis". In the latter, respecting cultural difference, Taylor would agree with Rawls, is crucial to attaining a "stability for the right reasons". It is not enough for this lifeworld to offer the content of the norms to be tested and to re-integrate them once tested. Cultural difference must also be respected at the level of justification itself. This is the heart of Taylor's second critique of Habermas.

In the first half of this chapter we saw the multiple ways in which Taylor has drawn attention to the importance of context in political theory. We first considered procedural liberalism. Taylor's critique here involved showing how government policies could not but endorse or promote certain goods and that neutrality was thus impossible in practice. Taylor's demonstration of the continued relevance of the "republican thesis", and the civic-humanist tradition more generally, provided strong evidence against the atomistic assumptions of procedural liberalism. With the move to the acknowledgement that patriotism is vital, but that it can still centre on an understanding of the rule of right as the common good, Taylor's critique now focusses on drawing attention both to the reality of "political phronesis" (i.e., that rights are not the only good) and to plural conceptions of justice (e.g., Aristotle's understanding of distributive justice according to

merit). What these critiques have in common is the context which Taylor is highlighting in various ways. This is the context of a shared way of life. This is not a homogeneous, single-community communitarian context. It is one in which, despite the growth of individualism and secularization, there are still common goods that government policies inescapably promote, that underlie and motivate patriotic sentiments, and that must be balanced politically.

The message throughout is, I think, loud and clear. Social, political, and cultural contexts are complex, overlapping, and interweaving backgrounds that enable human agency in the most full-blooded sense. We will recall from the first chapter Taylor's critique of mechanistic psychological theories of human behaviour. If attempts at reductively and narrowly explaining and understanding human behaviour at its most basic levels are near next to impossible, shouldn't this give us pause to think about the possibilities for analogously narrow (i.e., procedural) explanations at the political level where the social, political, and cultural contexts are immeasurably more complex?

CONCLUSION

I began this thesis with the claim that a full understanding of Taylor's moral and political ideas requires some measure of appreciation of the broader philosophy of which they form a part. This was deemed necessary because of an important feature of Taylor's philosophy as a whole: its coherence. One of my objectives in this thesis has been to provide an interpretation of what that coherence entails. This interpretation focussed on a theme I claimed is at the heart of Taylor's philosophical project, both vivifying and unifying its multiple parts: what I called the "content-context" distinction. To substantiate this claim, I will start here with a brief review of the various guises under which the content-context distinction has presented itself in the course of this thesis.

Common to my reading of Taylor's analysis in all four chapters has been: 1) a designated object of study, 2) an outline of dominant theories about that object, and 3) a critique of those theories based on, among other things, the content-context distinction. In chapter one, the object of study was dual: human agency in general and human knowledge in particular. Dominant modern theories about the former have been largely mechanistic (e.g., behaviourism, AI-models), taking their inspiration from the natural science model. Dominant theories about the latter have, in some form, usually been based on equating knowledge with accurate mental representations of an external world and concerned with finding the proper grounds (traditionally metaphysical) for these representations. Taylor associates theories of knowledge of this sort with what he calls "traditional epistemology" or the "epistemological tradition". His critique of both theories of human agency and of knowledge draw on the writings of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein and involve putting into relief the engaged nature of human agency and the role of practices in grounding our knowledge claims.

The basic problem with dominant theories in these two areas is that they focus too exclusively on certain aspects of their objects of study, which, if taken to be the definitional of those objects, don't really do them justice. For example, mechanistic theories of human agency are often narrowly concerned with explaining performance, such as throwing a ball, while epistemological theories focus on conceptual thought in language. Human agency is about much more than skilled performance, human

knowledge about more than concepts. Part of the original motivation for this narrowness lies in the natural science model, according to Taylor, and the attempt to understand human beings in terms co-extensive with a scientific view of the world. What this misses are the larger contexts of agency and knowledge. Human beings are primordially engaged with their world, acting in it, dealing with things, etc. The calculations on which skilled performance may depend are not what humans are thinking of when they throw a ball; the act itself is primary. Even if one is not consciously thinking of throwing a ball, however, that is the point: engagement is primary, not reflective awareness. Our more basic forms of knowledge, such as bodily know-how, and our more developed forms, such as conceptual thought, all depend on this context of engagement and practices. The point here is not, for example, to accuse theories of logic of not heeding the importance of, say, bodily know-how. Rather, it is to resist attempts to explain what human knowledge is all about only in terms of things like theories of logic (i.e., such attempts fail to heed the importance of bodily know-how in human knowledge). To fully understand human agency and knowledge, we must come to see the larger contexts in which they operate and make sense.

The method Taylor uses to articulate part of the background contexts of human agency which I gave a reading of at the end of the first chapter was put into action in chapter two. To recap, this involves a hermeneutico-phenomenological method which studies the interpretations and actual experiences of daily human life in order, in part, to uncover the inescapable structures of human agency. Following the scheme above, the object of study discussed here is human morality and moral agency. One dominant line of theories are naturalist in bent: they seek, as in chapter one, to explain human morality in terms co-extensive with the natural sciences. Values are reduced to projections, which humans may or may not be capable of avoiding, onto a fundamentally neutral physical world. Taylor's critique of such theories comes in the form of an alternative theory, a theory of moral phenomenology. It involves an elaboration of strong evaluation, qualitative distinctions, moral frameworks, and webs of interlocution. Their existence is defended on the grounds that these are what human beings everywhere inescapably depend on in order to be capable of living lives which have meaning. Put differently, human identity as we know it is simply not conceivable without these features. Together,

they define the wider context in which the specific content of human morality (values, norms, injunctions, etc.) is situated and in which, again, it both functions and has sense.

In chapters three and four, we examined contemporary moral and political theories—in particular, a dominant form in which they have been presented in the West, captured by the term proceduralism. Proceduralism was understood to encompass both the focus of moral and political theories on procedures, on how to treat other people/citizens, e.g., treating them as ends or in accordance with the difference principle, and on the procedures for generating these procedures, e.g., the categorical imperative or the original position. The line of thought connecting the four chapters is evident. The proceduralism of political theory derives from the proceduralism of moral theory. Taylor's critique of moral proceduralism draws on his theory of moral phenomenology, which is in turn built on his understanding and approach to human agency. Proceduralism in moral and political theory, which is also linked to the dominance of the epistemological and natural science models, fails to explain and account for many things, including the role of goods and common goods in generating the content of the relevant procedures. For example, a respect for human rights exists in the context of a developed and complex understanding of human goods and capacities which give the corresponding rights their meaning. Freedoms of expression and religion, and the corresponding injunction to respect them, don't make sense except in the context of a civilization in which expression and religious faith are intrinsic parts of an understanding of what it means to be human. By the same token, the difference principle's concern with the just distribution of goods or the principle of neutrality's efforts to ensure equal treatment only have meaning in the context of a civilization which has come to see justice and equality as especially important common goods in a whole range that combine to generate feelings of common identity and patriotism. Beyond this, there is the global context of cultural pluralism. Here too, Taylor wants to argue that a basis for the common good of respect for human rights can be discerned in the shared but diversely expressed intuitions of all cultures of the importance of the human. By not paying close enough attention to these wider contexts of goods and common goods that are in turn embedded in different cultures and shared ways of life, procedural theories fail to measure up to reality and thus undermine their own credibility.

The content-context distinction and contemporary life

For Taylor, the content-context distinction is thus of fundamental importance to our understanding of human life at many levels. As presented above, this project is exclusively academic in nature. I schematized the chapters of this thesis as focussing on a particular object of study, about which there exist dominant theories, which are in turn the object of Taylor's critique on the basis of the content-context distinction in part. It might be argued, however, that Taylor's philosophical concerns are rooted in his practical concerns about the contemporary world. His lectures for radio broadcast in *The Malaise of Modernity* are eloquent testimony to this fact. One of the topics Taylor considers there is modern individualism. Not surprisingly, his critical remarks in these lectures are reserved for those forms of individualism which are not sufficiently aware of the contexts without which individualism would be an unreality. To be an individual and to be authentically so, capable of making meaningful choices in life, requires what Taylor calls "horizons of significance".

> Things take on importance against a background of intelligibility. Let us call this a horizon. It follows that one of the things we can't do, if we are to define ourselves significantly, is suppress or deny the horizons against which things take on significance for us. This is the kind of self-defeating move frequently being carried out in our subjectivist civilization. In stressing the legitimacy of choice between certain options, we very often find ourselves depriving the options of their significance. [...]
> Self-choice as an ideal makes sense only because some *issues* are more significant than others. I couldn't claim to be a self-chooser, and deploy a whole Nietzchean vocabulary of self-making, just because I choose steak and fries over poutine for lunch. Which issues are significant, *I* do not determine. If I did, no issue would be significant. But then the very ideal of self-choosing *as a moral ideal* would be impossible.[1]

An individualism which wants to claim intelligibility for the idea of complete control and power of the individual over her life and identity is ultimately incoherent.

The similarities here to Taylor's theory of moral phenomenology are no accident. The exact same insights inform both accounts, betraying only the socially engaged nature of Taylor's philosophy. Taylor goes on to bring into further relief the "inescapable horizons"[2] of human identity.

> Otherwise put, I can define my identity only against a background of things that matter. But to bracket out history, nature, society, the demands of solidarity,

> everything but what I find in myself, would be to eliminate all candidates for what matters. Only if I exist in a world in which history, or the demands of nature, or the needs of my fellow human beings, or the duties of citizenship, or the call of God, or something else of this order *matters* crucially, can I define an identity for myself that is not trivial. Authenticity is not the enemy of demands that emanate from beyond the self; it supposes such demands.[3]

Again, as in the account of moral phenomenology, these horizons of significance do not just exist fully articulated, ready for the individual to access somehow. They are originally created/discovered, modified, and perpetuated by groups of people. They only exist because communities exist. The individual thus only becomes an individual (i.e., has an identity) in the context of such communities. These correspond to "webs of interlocution" in Taylor's moral phenomenology.

> The general feature of human life that I want to evoke is its fundamentally *dialogical* character. We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining an identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression. [...] No one acquires the languages needed for self-definition on their own. We are introduced to them through exchanges with others who matter to us—what George Herbert Mead called "significant others".[4]

These communities can therefore be small, involving even only two people. Dialogue is the essential component. Subjectivist forms of individualism are thus refuted by 1) inescapable horizons of significance, and 2) the inescapably dialogical nature of human identity. Understanding and appreciating these contexts of individuality enable us to move beyond subjectivism to a fuller and richer form of being individuals.

This overview of Taylor's critique of subjectivist individualism has highlighted important aspects of his philosophy and has shown again the centrality of the content-context distinction. Its practical intent, however, has also shown the extent to which Taylor's ideas about and understanding of moral and political issues is socially engaged. The sources of his insights lie close to the ground. This I believe also shows the extent to which his ideas, taken together, amount to a particular view of the human condition, as we noted in the Introduction. It is a view that is (as this thesis has, I hope, illustrated) very broad in scope. With this in mind, we can now turn to two misconstruals which, I believe, originate in the lack of a sufficient understanding of this view.

Flanagan, strong evaluation, and articulateness

It will be recalled that the feature of human agency lying at the heart of Taylor's theory of moral phenomenology is the capacity for strong evaluation. In Owen Flanagan's discussion of Taylor's moral ideas, it is a misunderstanding of this feature that sets the stage for a series of misreadings of Taylor.[5] There are at least ten points on which Flanagan's discussion misconstrues what Taylor is trying to say.[6] Although we will not examine each in detail, some of them will be touched on in what follows.

Flanagan's first misunderstanding of Taylor's notion of strong evaluation is his belief that strong evaluators represent a type of person, different from weak evaluators. The former are motivated by higher ideals and standards (more noble, more worthy[7]), are reflective, and have an articulated understanding of the values by which they live. The latter are portrayed as more normal souls, distinctly average in comparison. They don't have high ideals, living more from day to day, (perhaps like Tolstoy's peasants, according to Flanagan's example), not being terribly reflective, and certainly not having articulated the values they live by.[8] Strong evaluators have the capacity for "ethical assessment" whereas weak evaluators range from "the simple wanton who makes no motivational assessments at all to persons who do make motivational assessments along a wide variety of dimensions, so long as these dimensions are not ethical."[9] On this reading of the difference between weak and strong evaluation, "Groucho Marx, Truman Capote, Gore Vidal, Paul Gauguin, Lucille Ball, and Mick Jagger might fit the bill of persons, even decent persons, whose lives are not, or were not, guided in any central way by ethical commitments or distinctively ethical evaluation."[10]

There are several problems with this reading of Flanagan's. Most important, perhaps, is the belief that strong and weak evaluators represent two different types of person. For Taylor this is simply impossible. This is because strong evaluation is so broad and so basic to human existence, and weak evaluation so incomplete on its own, that a human being who lacked the former or possessed only the latter would be unthinkable. As Taylor writes, "[a] true 'simple weigher' [i.e., weak evaluator] in all contexts in life would be a severely pathological case, incapable even of what we would call an identity, incapable of shame and much else."[11] Strong evaluation is thus not limited to "ethical assessment". For one thing, it extends to other domains of life, such as

the aesthetic domain (saying why I prefer Bach to Liszt involves a strong evaluation).[12] More importantly, strong evaluation in the ethical domain does not involve "higher standards" alone It involves being sensitive to the norms, standards, and values of the culture(s) and communities in which one participates. Strong evaluation, as we saw in chapter two, is what lies behind our capacity to feel things like shame, pride, joy, humiliation, wonder, etc. In making distinctions and valuing certain ways of being over others, this whole gamut of emotions is opened up to us. Strong evaluations also lie at the base of our identities enabling me to have the allegiances I do, and, more generally, the very sense of who I am as a person and what I stand for. Thus everyone is a strong evaluator, and no one is a weak evaluator alone.

Articulateness, however, is not a condition of strong evaluation. It is something we can grow to acquire, but is not a defining characteristic of personhood. Rather, strong evaluation is a condition of articulacy, according to Taylor.[13] The activity of strong evaluation is universal to all human beings, strong evaluations being constitutive of any individual's sense of who s/he is. They are the background context for our sense of identity.

> I don't consider it a condition of acting out of a strong evaluation that one has articulated and critically reflected on one's framework. Clearly this would be to set too narrow entry conditions. I mean simply that one is operating with a sense that some desires, goals, aspirations, are qualitatively higher than others.[14]

Articulacy about these strong evaluations, however, remains something we can develop, a potential to be fulfilled. Prior to this, a pre-articulate context of strong evaluations exists for all human beings, informing their actions, decisions, commitments, and beliefs. This context is a condition of normal, undamaged human agency according to Taylor.

The distinction here between an inescapable context of strong evaluations and the call to articulation is one Flanagan fails to appreciate. His reading of Taylor misconceives him as advocating a certain mode of life that is the best way to be human, one that involves strong evaluations (on Flanagan's reading of these as high ethical standards) about which we are articulate. Taylor's theory of moral phenomenology, however, is not about different ways of living one's life, but rather about how that life is in fact inescapably lived, what is intrinsic to and constitutive of it. A context of strong evaluations is basic to any human identity; no identity is possible without this enabling

context. Articulation of these strong evaluations, to which we are *already* committed, naturally (but not necessarily) follows. But it is the context of strong evaluations and not articulacy that Taylor considers "inescapable".

Flanagan's misconstrual of Taylor seems to be rooted in the modern sensitivity to non-first-person ethical oughts, that is, to the pretensions of anyone to tell anyone else how they should live their lives. He misreads Taylor's notion of strong evaluation as a feature of ethical (i.e., obeying high standards), reflective, and morally articulate (and hence "better" people) and concludes that Taylor is being too "intellectualist" in conceiving of strong evaluation as basic to human agency.[15] As we have seen, however, this is to misunderstand what Taylor means by strong evaluation and its role in our lives. In fact, strong evaluation is the central feature in Taylor's attempts to theorize *how* moral agency *works*. He is trying to describe what is fully involved in moral experience, how it is possible, what enables it. To be sure, as we discussed in chapter one, such a theory has normative implications. Taylor is fully aware of these. His theory, in showing us how we inescapably are to ourselves can and does in turn affect our self-interpretations. These kinds of normative implications, however, are a far cry from the kind of explicitly prescriptive claims Flanagan accuses Taylor of making. Behind these false accusations is Flanagan's failure to appreciate the intent of Taylor's theory of moral phenomenology which is first and foremost aimed at uncovering and explaining the inescapable contexts and structures of moral agency.

Kymlicka, qualitative distinctions, and moral sources

A similar misunderstanding of Taylor's theory of moral phenomenology underlies Will Kymlicka's misconstrual of Taylor's critique of contemporary moral theory.[16] Instead of reading Taylor's critique against the background of his moral phenomenology, Kymlicka tends to assimilate it to the terms of contemporary moral theory itself, terms that Taylor precisely wants to challenge. For example, this assimilation is what leads Kymlicka to see as a problem Taylor's "idiosyncratic terminology".

> He says that utilitarians and Kantians are concerned with 'basic reasons' rather than 'qualitative distinction', and 'procedural rationality' rather than 'substantive rationality'. These are not the terms that the theorists themselves use, and I

> sometimes find it difficult to understand how these terms relate to the more familiar terms used by the philosophers Taylor is ostensibly discussing.[17]

To be sure, Kymlicka is right to say that the terms Taylor uses in his critique are not ones the philosophers he is criticizing use. But this is because Taylor is trying to find words to characterize what he believes is a certain brand of moral theory. These words are designed to apply to a range of theories and yet still capture what they have in common. More important than this, however, is the position from which Taylor is speaking. His critique and the terms he uses derive from the theory of moral phenomenology he lays out in the pages leading up to the critique itself in *Sources of the Self*.

Kymlicka makes no mention of this theory in his discussion. Had he contextualized Taylor's critique in this fashion, however, he would certainly have had less trouble than he confesses to have had in grasping the distinction between "basic reasons" and "qualitative distinctions".[18] He reads Taylor as arguing that while basic reasons may instruct us as to how to act in particular situations, qualitative distinctions articulate the moral point of these basic reasons, i.e., why they should be followed.[19] For example, qualitative distinctions could explain why humans are worthy of respect.[20] This is, however, too narrow a reading of the role of qualitative distinctions in our lives. It assimilates them too much to the status of basic reasons: they are more than just the "why" behind a particular basic reason. In his discussion of moral phenomenology in *Sources of the Self*, Taylor presents qualitative distinctions (analogous to "strong evaluations") in the context of a discussion of moral frameworks.[21] Frameworks are made up of a set of qualitative distinctions which together define different goods, ways of being, or modes of life that inform our actions and identities, giving meaning to our lives. Such ways of being include rational mastery, the (Homeric) ethics of fame, or the affirmation of ordinary life and its associated valuation of love relationships. Our actions always occur against the background of these frameworks of qualitative distinctions. This includes our moral actions. For example, my respect for another's freedom of expression only has meaning because the good of human expression resonates with me.

Now on the basis of this understanding of qualitative distinctions, Taylor criticizes basic reasons for grounding our moral actions in a way that doesn't match up with how human beings in fact experience them. Taylor's claim is that most people do

not reflect on a universalization principle, for example, when they decide how to act. Some version of it may certainly guide them in part, but it can never account for the full moral experience or moral motivation. For this we need to understand how moral action occurs against a background of conceptions of the good, consisting of, in Taylor's terminology, moral frameworks of qualitative distinctions (or strong evaluations).

This brings us to the heart of Kymlicka's misconstrual of Taylor's critique of contemporary moral theory. Kymlicka asks: "Is it a problem that contemporary moral philosophers have not tried to determine the particular content of a worthwhile conception of the good?"[22] He goes on to affirm: "Taylor looks to moral philosophy to find out what ends are most worthwhile, and is disappointed to find out that the philosophers are only discussing what is morally impermissible."[23] Taylor *is* disappointed to find that moral philosophy has a "truncated" conception of morality;[24] however, he nowhere states that the task of moral philosophy should be to tell us what ends are most worthwhile or how we should live our lives. Once again, Kymlicka fails to appreciate the intent of Taylor's theory of moral phenomenology in the same way Flanagan has. Taylor is not trying to tell us which goods are best, but rather that the view of morality offered to us by contemporary moral philosophy fails to correspond to real moral agency and experience. This lack of fit is serious in part because of its consequence: the contemporary understanding of morality becomes synonymous with the view of it in contemporary moral theory. That is to say, we end up thinking of morality as defined by right action, justice, human rights, etc. This both narrows the field of possible discussion and blinds us to the fullness of human morality in which conceptions of the good figure so centrally.

A good example of a misreading by Kymlicka that grows out of this lack of appreciation of the theory of moral phenomenology's intent is his assimilation of Taylor's notion of "moral sources" to the status of a determinant of moral action. Kymlicka writes that while people may be inspired to moral action because of "strong sources", should these fail, moral action must be enforced, perhaps using the "coercive power of the state".[25] There are at least a couple of problems with Kymlicka's position here. First, Kymlicka is imposing the terms of contemporary moral theory here on Taylor's notion of moral sources in reading it as designed to justify moral action.

Taylor's moral phenomenology is not designed to replace the justificatory apparatus of contemporary moral theories (e.g., basic reasons, impartiality, etc.) with one that he believes is more adequate. He is not saying that moral sources are a better way to secure moral action. As we noted above, the theory of moral phenomenology is a structural theory of moral agency. Through it, Taylor is trying to explain how moral agency works and what is required for its normal and full operation. We recalled in our discussion of Flanagan that a context of strong evaluations or qualitative distinctions is essential to human identity. Through his notion of moral sources, Taylor is trying to get at the ways human beings endow these evaluations, distinctions—or goods—with meaning and force. These sources on which we draw Taylor calls "constitutive goods", as we saw at the end of chapter three, "contemplation of or contact with which empowers us to be good."[26] (Examples included Plato's Forms, a belief in God, Aristotle's conception of man as possessing logos). This reading of moral sources is a far cry from the one Kymlicka draws on in his article.

The assumption informing Kymlicka's misreading here gets at the second problem with his position, one Taylor identifies in his response to Kymlicka. He believes that moral philosophy can in fact be divided up, that moral philosophers can instruct us on what we have been calling "moral action" (according to what is right) while artists or ministers can help us with the good life. "The first can give us moral education, the second offer rather inspiration",[27] according to Taylor's summary of Kymlicka's position. On the basis of this assumption of a division of labour, Kymlicka's misreading of Taylor, or at least its motives, becomes clearer. Taylor's talk of qualitative distinctions, goods, and moral sources simply has no place in moral philosophy understood on this model. (But this still does not explain Kymlicka's failure to grasp the full context against which Taylor's critique makes sense, that is, the theory of moral phenomenology.)

Taylor questions the validity of this separation on two fronts. First, he asks whether in all cases what is right will override what is good. "Questions of justice can vary all the way from those which cry to heaven for vengeance to minor inequities, while issues about the good life range from relatively minor potential enrichments to what gives meaning to my life."[28] Taylor is arguing here for 1) recognition that we cannot ground a

priority of the right over the good in all cases, and for 2) awareness of the diversity of goods.

Second, Taylor has a strong reaction to the tone of Kymlicka's suggestions for the use of the "coercive power of the state" if voluntary compliance in obeying moral norms cannot be secured.

> Indeed, there is something chilling in Kymlicka's willingness to resort to 'the coercive power of the state', as though the principles could be established as valid and binding, independent of the conditions of their application. A humane politics cannot function like this, as a lot of painful experience in our century has shown. Those who have been willing to say: forget the consequences, have frequently wreaked more havoc than the *anciens régimes* they deconstructed.
>
> Ethical life in fact faces us with choices in which everything: moral principles, goods, interests, our own future and that of others, all come into consideration. Unless we have some way of showing a priori that some of these always and exceptionlessly take precedence over others, we cannot in fact afford to segregate the discipline of practical philosophy into watertight compartments. If this is so then the reproach I want to level at proceduralists is a serious one: that they don't give enough attention to the good to determine whether and when the moral principles they offer ought to be modified to accommodate its demands.[29]

Thus an openness to what I have called "political phronesis" is a condition of a healthy and "humane" politics, according to Taylor. The general point Taylor makes here that I want to put into relief is that proceduralist theories don't measure up when they come face to face with the reality of ethical life. We have witnessed this point being made repeatedly in chapters three and four. In remaining confined within the strictures and assumptions of contemporary moral theory, Kymlicka fails to see the force of Taylor's arguments for paying closer attention to the contexts both of moral phenomenology and ethical life.

These two misconstruals highlight the centrality of the content-context distinction in Taylor's philosophy. I have been arguing, throughout the course of this thesis, for what I believe is an accurate and fair way to read Taylor, one that hinges on this distinction. In so doing, I have not only drawn attention to Taylor's call for awareness of the role of context in different areas of human life, but also to the need to see Taylor's own ideas in their proper context. The misconstruals just considered illustrate both these

points. First, both Flanagan and Kymlicka reflect on Taylor's moral and political ideas without paying close enough attention to his theory of moral phenomenology, which forms the background out of which they emerge and against which they make full sense. Second, their misconstruals consequently amount to misreadings of Taylor (e.g., Flanagan's reading of strong evaluation, Kymlicka's reading of qualitative distinctions) which misconceive his purposes. He is not trying to defend what he believes is the best way to be a human being (Flanagan), nor is he asking moral philosophy to tell him what goods are most worthy (Kymlicka). He is trying, rather, to show us that the picture of moral agency presented to us by contemporary moral theories does not correspond to moral agency as it is in fact lived. Too many things are missing from that picture. His own account of moral phenomenology tries to rectify this. On the basis of the fuller picture he depicts, Taylor then points out where and how contemporary moral, and, by extension, political theories fail to be credible and plausible.

The particular point is that we should understand Taylor's moral and political ideas in the context of his broader philosophy, especially his theory of moral phenomenology. The general point is that Taylor's philosophy is largely built up around the content-context distinction. We have explored in this thesis the various ways Taylor has drawn our attention to the presence of the content-context distinction in different areas of human life: agency, knowledge, moral experience, political life. We have also encountered different reasons for the need to be aware of this distinction. I would like to conclude this thesis with a consideration of one such reason which I think is the most important one for Taylor and which thus provides more justification for my claim that we should read Taylor's philosophy with the content-context distinction in mind: the normative implications of theory.

In his critique of contemporary theories of knowledge, morality, and politics, one thing Taylor is *not* trying to do is to resist the theoretical impulse to model reality. He is not arguing that we must include all the complexities of contextualized experience in our theories for them to be adequate. Such theories would be as useless as a one-to-one map of the world. In theorizing reality, we do in fact have to select and simplify. Taylor's own theory of moral phenomenology does this: it presents us with a model of our moral experience. But what distinguishes it from the model embedded in contemporary moral

theory, according to Taylor, is that it does not leave out salient features of moral agency, such as strong evaluation or webs of interlocution, in Taylor's terminology. Omissions as important as these are serious because theories always have normative implications (especially if they are widely espoused). Theories always have some sort of underlying "explanatory framework", as we saw at the beginning of chapter one. The explanatory framework of much contemporary moral theory amounts to a model of moral agency which identifies morality with what it is right to do. The explanatory framework of much contemporary political theory amounts to a model of the state as fully neutral among conceptions of the good life. Taylor believes that these explanatory frameworks are inaccurate, as we have seen. The real problem, however, is not that we have an explanation that is wrong. It is that these theories can (and, according to Taylor, have) come to shape our individual and collective self-understandings. And if they are wrong, then we end up with inaccurate self-understandings and, in turn, misguided action.

In order to rectify these explanatory frameworks—and hence correct our self-understandings and enable more effective and well-informed action—we need to broaden them. The frameworks are problematic because they leave out salient features of human life. Part of the process of rectifying them involves exposing the epistemological, naturalist, and moral motives that led us to adopt these narrow frameworks in the first place. More directly, the best way to get at the features and whatever else is missing is to be sensitive to the contexts that enable whatever we are focussing on to exist. In broadening our vision to encompass these contexts (no small feat in itself) we can reflect on what needs to be added to our existing account. Thus, for example, we see Taylor drawing our attention to strong evaluation and webs of interlocution in the moral context or patriotism and common goods in the political context.

Although we may not succeed in articulating all the salient features of these contexts, the very awareness of the constitutive role of context alters irrevocably our whole understanding of morality or politics. The terms of explanation on offer to us by contemporary theories appear unduly narrow from this wider perspective. Bringing us first to an awareness of these contexts, and then to articulacy about them, is the primary goal of Taylor's philosophy. It is all about releasing ourselves from our self-imposed blinkers.

Endnotes

Introduction

1. See, for example, the collection of articles in *Philosophy in an age of pluralism: the philosophy of Charles Taylor in question*, ed. James Tully, (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), especially Isaiah Berlin, "Introduction"; the collection of articles by French and Québécois scholars resulting from a colloquium held in France in *Charles Taylor et l'interprétation de l'identité moderne*, ed. Guy Laforest and Philippe de Lara, (Cerisy, France and Laval, Québec: Centre culturelle internationale de Cerisy la Salle and Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1998); the papers from the symposia on *Sources of the Self* published in *Inquiry*, 34, June 1991 and *Dialogue*, XXXIII, 1994; and the reviews and symposium papers on his *Philosophical Papers* (2 vols) published in the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 18, Number 3, September 1988.

2. I shall consider two misconstruals of Taylor in the Conclusion by Owen Flanagan and Will Kymlicka. See Owen Flanagan, "Identity and Reflection", *Self-expressions: mind, morals, and the meaning of life*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 142-170; Will Kymlicka, "The Ethics of Inarticulacy", *Inquiry*, 34 (June 1991), pp. 155-182.

3. Taylor, "Comments and Replies", *Inquiry*, p. 244.

4. James Tully, "Preface", *Philosophy in an age of pluralism*, ed. James Tully, (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), p. xiii.

5. Taylor, "Introduction", *Human Agency and Language*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), p. 1. Taylor uses this word to characterize what underlies his *Philosophical Papers*.

6. Taylor, "Engaged agency and background in Heidegger", *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles Guigan, (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p. 329.

I: Human agency and epistemology

1. Taylor, *The Explanation of Behaviour*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 4; "Introduction", *Human Agency and Language*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), p. 1.

2. *Human Agency and Language*, pp. 15-44. Appeared originally in *The Self*, ed. T. Mischel, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), pp. 103-35.

3. Appendix I, Interview with Charles Taylor, p. 128.

4. See "Neutrality in Political Science", *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), pp. 59-60

5. op. cit.

6. "Neutrality in Political Science", p. 65.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-73. The reference here is to S. M. Lipset's *Political Man.*

8. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

13. I would argue that, for Taylor, the difference between a physiological theory and a typology of governments in terms of built-in value slopes lies in the extent to which what we are theorizing exists independently of social construction and practice. The human body is not entirely the product of social practice, whereas government is. See Taylor, "Social theory as practice", *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, pp. 91-115.

14. See Taylor, "Engaged agency and background in Heidegger", *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles Guigan, (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), pp. 323-324.

15. quoted in Taylor, "The Concept of a Person", *Human Agency and Language*, p. 104.

16. See, for example, Taylor, "Overcoming Epistemology", *Philosophical Arguments*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1995), pp. 1-19 and Taylor, "Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition", *Reading Rorty*, ed. Alan Malachowski, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 257-275. Taylor uses the word "epistemological" broadly here. The original focus of this tradition is on understanding human knowledge through an analysis of the content of knowledge claims and the grounds for them. But this particular understanding of human knowledge translates into a particular understanding of the agent. We will unpack what Taylor means by "epistemological" in the course of this chapter. For further explanation see "Overcoming Epistemology".

17. "Language and Human Nature", *Human Agency and Language*, p. 246. Taylor picks up this point on p. 101 of *Sources* where he speaks of the "great intramural debate of the last two centuries, pitting the philosophy of the Enlightenment against the various forms of Romantic opposition."

18. *Ibid.*

19. See, for example, "Introduction", *Human Agency and Language*, and "Preface", *Philosophical Arguments*, for his overview of the problem.

20. I have drawn here on chapter 12 of *Sources*, "A Digression on Historical Explanation", pp. 202-203. We will return to this point later when we examine the argument in his "Philosophy and its History".

21. Here I am drawing on Taylor's account in *Sources*, pp. 160-161. See also, Taylor, "Justice After Virtue", *Kritische Methode und Zukunft der Anthropologie*, ed. M. Benedikt and R. Berger, (Vienna, 1985), pp. 23-26.

22. *Sources*, p. 161.

23. *Ibid.*

24. R. Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, IIe Partie, in *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, (Paris: Vrin, 1973), VI, 13. Quoted in Taylor, *Sources*, p. 161.

25. F. Bacon, *Novum Organum*, I. 73. Quoted in Taylor, *Sources*, p. 85.

26. "Engaged agency and background in Heidegger", pp. 323-324.

27. Second rule, *Discours de la méthode*.

28. "Engaged agency and background in Heidegger", p. 319.

29. "Overcoming Epistemology", *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 3.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

31. *Sources*, p. 156.

32. See, for example, "Engaged agency and background in Heidegger", p. 324; Taylor, "Consciousness", *Explaining Human Behaviour*, ed. Paul F. Secord, pp. 35-37; "Cognitive Psychology", *Human Agency and Language*, pp. 187-212.

33. "The Concept of a Person", p. 106.

34. See, for example, "Engaged agency and background in Heidegger", pp. 319ff; "Overcoming Epistemology", p. 7.

35. Bernard William, *Descartes*, (London: Hammondsworth, 1978) as quoted in Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, pp. 2-3, 79.

36. "Engaged agency and background in Heidegger", pp. 320-321.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 320. "Overcoming Epistemology", pp. 4-5.

38. "Engaged agency and background in Heidegger", p. 318.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 321-322.

40. *Ibid.*, p.318.

41. *Ibid.*, pp. 321-322.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 323.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 321; "The Concept of a Person", p. 106.

44. "Overcoming Epistemology", p. 7.

45. *Ibid.*

46. "Engaged agency and background in Heidegger", p. 323, (italics added).

47. Taylor, "Embodied agency", *Merleau-Ponty: critical essays*, ed. Henry Pietersma, (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1990), p. 11.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

49. Appendix I, p.133, 139.

50. "Engaged agency and background in Heidegger", p. 318.

51. *Ibid.*

52. "Embodied Agency", pp. 1, 3-4, 6.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 5.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

57. "Language and Human Nature", pp. 227-234; "Heidegger, Language and Ecology", *Philosophical Arguments*, pp. 100-106.

58. "Language and Human Nature", pp. 222-227.

59. See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chapter IV.

60. "Language and Human Nature", pp. 218-221.

61. "Hegel's Philosophy of Mind", pp. 91-92.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 228-229.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

64. "Lichtung or Lebensform: Parallels between Heidegger and Wittgenstein", *Philosophical Arguments*, pp. 74-75.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

66. "Language and Human Nature", p. 232.

67. Taylor explores this point in "Theories of Meaning", *Human Agency and Language*.

68. "Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition", p. 270.

69. "Engaged agency and background in Heidegger", pp. 326-327.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 327. In this, Taylor claims, it is akin to Bourdieu's "habitus". See Taylor, "To Follow a Rule", *Philosophical Arguments*, pp. 171-174.

71. "Engaged agency and background in Heidegger", p. 325.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 326.

73. Appendix I, p. 139.

74. Taylor, "Philosophy and its History", *Philosophy in History*, ed. Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner, (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), p. 20.

75. Taylor, *Hegel*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1975), pp. 540-541.

76. "Philosophy and its History", p. 20.

77. "Engaged agency and background in Heidegger", p. 329.

78. "Embodied agency", p. 18.

79. "Engaged agency and background in Heidegger", p. 326.

80. "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments", *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 32.

81. "Engaged agency and background in Heidegger", p. 328.

82. Taylor, "The Dialogical Self", *The Interpretive Turn: philosophy, science, culture*, ed. David R. Hiley, James F. Bohman, and Richard M. Shusterman, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U.P., 1991), p. 308.

83. "Overcoming Epistemology", pp. 1-3, 14-15.

84. W. V. Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized", *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, (New York, 1969), pp. 69-90. Quoted in "Overcoming Epistemology", p. 2.

85. "Overcoming Epistemology", pp. 2-3, 13-14.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

87. "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments", p. 20.

88. "Overcoming Epistemology", p. 10.

89. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A111, A112. Quoted in "Overcoming Epistemology", p. 10.

90. "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments", p. 25.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

93. "Overcoming Epistemology", p. 10; "Hegel's Philosophy of Mind", *Human Agency and Language*, p. 80; Appendix I, p. 131.

94. "Hegel's Philosophy of Mind", p. 80.

95. "Overcoming Epistemology", p. 11.

96. "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments", pp. 30-31.

97. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

98. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

99. *Ibid.*

100. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

101. "Consciousness", pp. 41ff.; "The Concept of a Person", pp. 98ff.

102. "The Concept of a Person", p. 98.

103. "Language and Human Nature", pp. 228ff.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

105. Taylor, "Self-interpreting Animals", *Human Agency and Language*.

106. *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, pp. 15-57; *Human Agency and Language*, pp. 45-76.

107. *Sources*, p. 52; Taylor, "The Moral Topography of the Self", *Hermeneutics and Psychological Theory*, ed. Stanley B. Messer, Louis A. Sass, and Robert L. Woolfolk, (London: Rutgers UP, 1988), pp. 299-300; "The Dialogical Self", p. 305-306.

108. "Consciousness", pp. 48-49.

109. "The Moral Topography of the Self", p. 299.

110. "Overcoming Epistemology", p. 14, 8.

111. "Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition", p. 258, 271.

112. *Ibid.*, pp. 270-271.

II: Naturalism and moral phenomenology

1. *Sources*, pp. 75-90.

2. Taylor, "The Dialogical Self", *The Interpretive Turn: philosophy, science, culture*, ed. David R. Hiley, James F. Bohman, and Richard M. Shusterman, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U.P., 1991), pp. 307, 304-305.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 307.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. Taylor, "The Moral Topography of the Self", *Hermeneutics and Psychological Theory*, ed. Stanley B. Messer, Louis A. Sass, and Robert L. Woolfolk, (London: Rutgers U.P., 1988), p. 299.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. This concept is first introduced in "What is Human Agency?", *Human Agency and Language*, pp. 15-44.

10. "What is Human Agency?", p. 16.

11. See Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the will and the concept of a person", *Journal of Philosophy*, 67:I (Jan. 1971), pp. 5-20.

12. See Appendix II.

13. "What is Human Agency?", p. 18; "Self-interpreting Animals", *Human Agency and Language*, pp. 65-68.

14. Williams, *Descartes*, (London: Hammondsworth, 1978). Cited by Taylor in *Human Agency and Language*, pp. 2, 79.

15. "The Concept of a Person", pp. 106ff.

16. "What is Human Agency?", pp. 19, 24.

17. Taylor provides a detailed analysis and refutation of these naturalist claims in Chapter Three, "The Ethics of Inarticulacy", of *Sources*. There is unfortunately no room to go into this in detail here.

18. "What is Human Agency?", pp. 21ff.

19. "Introduction", *Human Agency and Language*, p. 1.

20. "How is Mechanism Conceivable?" and "Cognitive Psychology", *Human Agency and Language*, p. 179, 206.

21. Taylor, "Peaceful Coexistence in Pyschology", p. 129.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 125. Taylor attributes this point to Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. See Appendix I, p. 140.

25. See Appendix I, p.134.

26. *Sources*, p. 57.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

30. *Ibid.*

31. See "Interview with Charles Taylor", *The McGill Review of Interdisciplinary Arts*, Volume 3, Spring 1996, p. 4.

32. *Sources*, p. 32.

33. See "The Moral Topography of the Self" and Chapter Two, "The Self in Moral Space", *Sources*.

34. "The Dialogical Self", p. 305.

35. "Overcoming Epistemology", pp. 16-17.

36. "The Dialogical Self", p. 306.

37. "The Moral Topography of the Self", p. 300.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 302, 300.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 302.

40. *Sources*, p, 26.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

43. *Sources*, p. 27, italics added.

44. "What is Human Agency?", p. 35.

45. *Sources*, pp. 47, 48.

46. Actually, this term appeared prior to *Sources* in Taylor, "The Diversity of Goods", *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), pp. 234ff.

47. *Sources*, p. 20.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

51. *Ibid.* p. 19.

52. *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 36.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

54. "Philosophy and its History", p. 23.

55. "What is Human Agency", p. 26. Taylor makes this point explicitly in his "Reply and re-articulation" in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, ed. James Tully, (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), p. 249: "I don't consider it a condition of acting out of a strong evaluation that one has articulated and critically reflected on one's framework."

56. "What is Human Agency?", p. 24, fn. 7; and "The Diversity of Goods", pp. 238-239 where Taylor notes that "the languages of qualitative contrast embrace more than the moral."

57. Taylor, "Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy", *Iris Murdoch and the search for human goodness*, ed. Maria Antonaccio and William Schweiker, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 17-18.

58. *Sources*, p. 18.

59. "What is Human Agency", pp. 36, 37.

60. "Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy", p. 18.

61. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1.7. Quoted in Taylor, "Heidegger, Language, Ecology", *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 113.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 102; Taylor, "Theories of Meaning", *Human Agency and Language*, p. 249-250.

63. Taylor, "Heidegger and Wittgenstein", *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 74.

64. See "Theories of Meaning".

65. "Language and Human Nature", p. 229.

66. It might well be argued that some descriptive function of language is presupposed in its expressive capacity. This point, and the issue of the priority of the expressive or

descriptive capacities of language in general, are discussed in detail in "Theories of Meaning".

67. "Theories of Meaning", p. 269.

68. *Ibid.*, pp. 269-270.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 257-260, 269-270.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 261.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 262.

72. "Self-interpreting Animals", p. 60. An import is used to designate "the way in which something can be relevant or of importance to the desires or purposes or aspirations or feelings of a subject" (48).

73. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

77. "Theories of Meaning", p. 263.

78. "Self-interpreting Animals", p. 67.

79. *Ibid.*

80. "What is Human Agency?", pp. 40ff.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

83. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

84. Taylor, "Lichtung or Lebensform: Parallels between Heidegger and Wittgenstein", *Philosophical Arguments*, pp. 69-70.

85. *Sources*, p. 39. The word "explicitly" here raises the point of whether an individual can ever fully renounce the relationship to some community at all. This cannot be broached in any detail other than to acknowledge that Taylor does not conclusively state his position on this matter, although he does emphasize the difficulties involved

in such a complete renunciation. See "What is Human Agency?", p. 34 and *Sources*, pp. 507-8.

III: Proceduralism and contemporary moral theory

1. Taylor, "The Diversity of Goods", *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, pp. 230-231.

2. *Sources*, p. 3.

3. See Taylor, "Cross-Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate", *Philosophical Arguments*.

4. *Sources*, p. 87.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Taylor, "Explanation and Practical Reason", *Philosophical Arguments*, pp. 34ff.

7. *Sources*, p. 10.

8. "The Diversity of Goods", pp. 230ff.

9. See "The Diversity of Goods", pp. 230ff; "Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy", p. 4.

10. "Philosophy and its History", pp. 19-22.

11. See for example the Introduction to Taylor's *Philosophical Papers*, pp. 4ff.

12. Taylor, "Justice After Virtue", *Kritische Methode und Zukunft der Anthropologie*, ed. M. Benedikt and R. Berger, (Vienna, 1985), p. 33.

13. *Sources*, pp. 80ff.

14. *Sources*, pp. 59-60.

15. "Explanation and Practical Reason", p. 45.

16. See "Justice After Virtue", pp. 24-25.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

18. *Sources*, pp. 76ff.

19. See Chapter 13, "God Loveth Adverbs", in *Sources*, pp. 211-233.

20. *Sources*, pp. 81ff.; "Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy", pp. 6ff.; for an extended discussion see *Sources*, Part III, "The Affirmation of Ordinary Life", pp. 211-304.

21. *Sources*, p. 82.

22. *Ibid.*

23. "Justice After Virtue", pp. 31-32.

24. Iris Murdoch, "The Sovereignty of Good", (London: Routledge, 1970), p. 80. Quoted in *Sources*, p. 84.

25. *Sources*, p. 84.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, I. 73. Quoted in *Sources*, p. 85.

28. *Sources*, p. 85.

29. "Introduction", *Philosophical Papers*, p. 3.

30. Thus although Kant's moral theory is procedural, it does not eschew qualitative distinctions. In fact, restoring a sense of them was a central part of Kant's critique of utilitarianism according to Taylor. See *Sources*, pp. 83-84.

31. Taylor, "Language and Society", *Communicative Action: essays on Jürgen Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action*, ed. Axel Honneth and Hans Joas, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 30-31.

32. Habermas, "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification", transl. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), p. 109.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

34. See *Sources*, pp. 62-75.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

37. "Language and Society", p. 32.

38. *Sources*, p. 88.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

42. "Justice After Virtue", p. 34.

43. "Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy", p. 11.

44. "Explanation and Practical Reason", p. 34.

45. "Overcoming Epistemology", p. 9.

46. "Explanation and Practical Reason", pp. 36ff.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

48. *Ibid.*

49. "Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy", p. 15.

50. "Justice After Virtue", p. 41.

51. "Explanation and Practical Reason", p. 54.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 36ff.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*

57. See "Language and Society", pp. 34-35.

58. "Explanation and Practical Reason", p. 38.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 39

60. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

61. *Sources*, p. 72.

62. *Ibid.*

63. "Explanation and Practical Reason", p. 52.

64. *Ibid.*

65. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

66. *Sources*, p. 75.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

68. "Justice After Virtue", pp. 34-36.

69. This is the title of an article by Taylor, "The Diversity of Goods", in his *Philosophy and the Human Sciences.*

70. "The Diversity of Goods", p. 244.

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 233ff.

72. "Language and Society", p. 32.

73. *Sources*, p. x.

74. See Chapter Four, "Moral Sources", *Sources.*

75. *Sources*, pp. 102-103.

76. On p. 92 of *Sources*, Taylor mentions the Socratic belief that "linguistic articulacy" is "part of the telos of human beings." He admits to sharing "some version of this conception."

77. For an extended discussion, see Chapter Four, "Moral Sources", *Sources.*

78. "Iris Murdoch and Moral Philosophy", p. 12.

79. *Ibid.*

80. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

81. *Ibid.*

82. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

83. *Ibid.*

84. *Sources*, p. 520.

IV: Proceduralism and contemporary political theory

1. *Sources*, pp. 531-532.

2. See Taylor, "Inwardness and the culture of modernity", *Zwischenbetrachtungen: im Prozess der Aufklärung*, ed. Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Clauss Offe, and Albrecht Wellmer (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), pp. 601-607.

3. "Cross-Purposes: the Liberal-Communitarian Debate", *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 186.

4. See Taylor, "Atomism" and "The Diversity of Goods", *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* and "Cross-Purposes: the Liberal-Communitarian Debate", *Philosophical Arguments*.

5. *Sources*, p. 532.

6. "Cross-Purposes: the Liberal-Communitarian Debate", pp. 186-187.

7. Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition", *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 245.

8. "Cross-Purposes: the Liberal-Communitarian Debate", p. 187.

9. "The Politics of Recognition", p. 246.

10. Taylor, "Reply and re-articulation", *Philosophy in an age of pluralism*, p. 252.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 253.

12. *Ibid.*

13. See Taylor, "Atomism", *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, pp. 187-210.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

15. "Cross-Purposes: the Liberal-Communitarian Debate", p. 181.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

17. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Harvard, 1971), p. 303.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 136-137.

19. "Cross-Purposes: the Liberal-Communitarian Debate", p. 184.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 181-182.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 187-188.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 190-191.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 195-196.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 197; Taylor, "Why Democracy Needs Patriotism", *For Love of Country: debating the limits of patriotism*, ed. Martha Nussbaum, (Beacon Press, 1996).

35. "Cross-Purposes: the Liberal-Communitarian Debate", p. 197.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 202.

39. *Ibid.*

40. "Atomism", pp. 195-196, 209. While Taylor's critique is much more elaborate than this example conveys, examining it in detail would take us too far afield from our present discussion of the nature of justice/rights qua political goods.

41. "Reply and re-articulation", *Philosophy in an age of pluralism*, p. 250.

42. "The Politics of Recognition", p. 246.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 247.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

46. "Justice After Virtue", pp. 42ff.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

51. *Sources*, p. 532.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*

54. See "The Politics of Recognition".

55. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 4.

56. See *ibid.*, p. 144.

57. *Ibid.*, p. xxvi.

58. See *ibid.*, p. 146ff. Of course, Taylor does not necessarily agree with this claim.

59. On the inadequacy of a *modus vivendi* see *ibid*, pp. xli, xlii-xliii and pp. 145-149.

60. *Ibid.*, p. lx.

61. *Ibid.*, p. lxii.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 147-148.

64. *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 12.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 389.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

67. See James Tully's summary of Habermas' project in "To Think and Act Differently", manuscript, Department of Political Science, University of Victoria, pp. 14ff.

68. Stephen K. White, "Reason, modernity, and democracy", *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, ed. Stephen K. White, (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), pp. 3-5.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

70. Habermas, "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification", transl. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), p. 100.

71. See *ibid.*, p. 58.

72. Tully, "To Think and Act Differently", p. 20. In his recent book, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, Habermas has finally dealt more explicitly with politics and democracy. There he lays out his idea of discursive democracy and explains the importance of intersubjectivity and the "equi-primordiality of private and public right [*Recht*]"; Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992), p. 151, quoted in White, "Reason, modernity and democracy", pp. 13, 12.

73. Habermas, "Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action", *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 137.

74. Habermas, "Discourse Ethics", p. 107.

75. *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

77. *Ibid*, p. 104.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

79. Habermas, "Morality and Ethical Life", *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 198.

80. Habermas, "Discourse Ethics", p. 89.

81. *Ibid.*, pp. 86-94.

82. Their exchange in the *Journal of Philosophy* would be an excellent place to start. See Habermas, "Reconciliation through the public use of reason: Remarks on John Rawls's *Political Liberalism*", *Journal of Philosophy*, 92:3 (March 1995), pp. 109-131; and Rawls, "Reply to Habermas", *Political Liberalism*, pp. 372-434, reprinted from the *Journal of Philosophy*, 92:3 (March 1995).

83. Habermas, "Reconciliation through the public use of reason", *Journal of Philosophy*, pp. 124-126.

84. Habermas, "Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action", p. 122.

85. Habermas, "Discourse Ethics", p. 103.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

87. Habermas, "Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action", p. 122.

88. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, pp. 390-392.

89. Taylor, "Reply and re-articulation", *Philosophy in an age of pluralism*, p. 247.

90. *Ibid.*

91. See for example *ibid.*, pp. 246-249; "Preface", "Explanation and Practical Reason", "Comparison, History, Truth", *Philosophical Arguments*, pp. xi-xii, pp. 55-60, 146-164; Taylor, "Inwardness and the culture of modernity", pp. 601-607, 622-623; Taylor, "A World Consensus on Human Rights?", *Dissent*, Summer 1996, pp. 15-21.

92. Taylor, "Inwardness and the culture of modernity", p. 601.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 604

94. *Ibid.*, pp. 604-605.

95. See for example "Understanding and ethnocentricity", *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*; "Comparison, History, Truth", *Philosophical Arguments*.

96. Taylor, "Comparison, History, Truth", pp. 162, 163.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

98. *Ibid.*p. 163.

99. Habermas, "Morality and Ethical Life", *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, p. 211.

100. Taylor, "Explanation and Practical Reason", *Philosophical Arguments*, p. 56.

101. Taylor, "Reply and re-articulation", *Philosophy in an age of Pluralism*, p. 248; "A World Consensus on Human Rights?", Dissent, pp. 15, 21.

102. "Reply and re-articulation", p. 248.

103. "Comparison, History, Truth", pp. 148-151.

104. "A World Consensus on Human Rights?", p. 15.

105. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

107. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

108. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

109. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

Conclusion

1. Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, (Toronto: Anansi, 1991), pp. 37, 39.

2. This is the name of the chapter from which these quotes are taken.

3. *The Malaise of Modernity*, pp. 40-41.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

5. Owen Flanagan, "Identity and Relfection", *Self-expressions: mind, morals, and the meaning of life*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 142-170). Daniel Weinstock's article, "The political theory of strong evaluation", *Philosophy in an age of pluralism*, draws on and thereby perpetuates Flanagan's misconstruals. I will thus confine myself to a consideration of Flanagan.

6. Here is a brief summary of these ten points: i) Flanagan misconstrues what Taylor means by strong evaluation, mistakenly believing that those capable of strong evaluation represent a type of person and that strong evaluation is defined by higher ethical standards (pp. 143-145, 146, 147ff, 150, 152-153, 154, 158, 159); ii) he represents strong evaluation as only ethical (whereas the capacity extends to other

domains as well, e.g., the aesthetic) (pp. 145, 147); iii) he misconstrues Taylor's choice of "Nietzchean" examples of standards of worth and nobility to have normative implications (p. 146); iv) he equates 'ethical' with "higher standards" (whereas for Taylor it implies, in part, a whole way of life and an identity based on it) (p. 147); v) he portrays Taylor's idea of contrast or contrastive space as being limited to "linguistic" contrast (p. 150) and as pertaining only to different modes of life to be chosen between (p. 151); vi) he reads Taylor as arguing that "articulateness" about our strong evaluations is necessary for personhood (pp. 151, 154, 155, 157, 158, 166); vii) he believes Taylor is an "essentialist" (this is perhaps debatable qua misreading) (p. 154); viii) he takes Taylor's understanding of language to be limited to linguistic competence (whereas in fact it encompasses Cassirer's notion of "symbolic forms") (pp. 155, 157); ix) he believes Taylor is arguing that we need transcendent grounds for all our moral claims (pp. 159-160); x) he misrepresents Taylor in his discussion of "reflectiveness" portraying it as something done according to certain values (e.g., evil ones in the case of the Nazis) whereas for Taylor reflection is what opens us to the values we (already) hold (pp. 162-163).

7. Taylor indeed uses as an example of strong evaluation the standard that some action is not worthy or noble, for example feeling envy in our example in chapter two. But this is only one kind of strong evaluation possible designed to show its applicability. Strong evaluation involves much more than noble action.

8. Flanagan, "Identity and Reflection", pp. 146ff.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Taylor, "Reply and re-articulation", *Philosophy in an age of pluralism*, p. 249.

12. Taylor, "What is Human Agency", *Human Agency and Language*, pp. 24-25.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

14. Taylor, "Reply and re-articulation", p. 249.

15. Flanagan, "Identity and Reflection", pp. 152, 157.

16. Will Kymlicka, "The Ethics of Inarticulacy", *Inquiry*, 34 (June 1991), pp. 155-182.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 163, pp. 163-168.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 163-165.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

21. See *Sources of the Self*, pp. 19-25.

22. Kymlicka, "The Ethics of Inarticulacy", p. 169.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Sources of the Self*, p. 3.

25. Kymlicka, "The Ethics of Inarticulacy", p. 174.

26. Taylor, "Comments and Replies", *Inquiry*, 34 (June 1991), p. 243.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, p. 244.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 244-245.

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Appendix I: Interview with Charles Taylor — May 13, 1998
(edited transcript)

[Note on tape quality: It must be noted that the recording was of poor quality. There are therefore gaps or unclear sections in what follows, marked where necessary by an ellipsis or a question mark. What might appear to be incomplete thoughts in the transcript should in all probability be attributed to these gaps, even where they may not be noted.]

Nigel: To begin, could the overarching name of your project be: philosophical anthropology?

Taylor: Yes, it could.

N: I think that the original origins of your project were negative, taking root in the reaction to mechanistic/behaviourist approaches to psychology, which you wanted to reject. And in so doing, you were lead to look at the origins of *this* view and then that led you to this whole set of theories, this whole approach to human agency that you feel is totally misguided. This is seen in so many of your articles in which, either implicitly or explicitly, you direct your arguments against "Enlightenment rationalism/empiricism", "the natural science model", "monological consciousness"—this whole approach which you reject in its application to the human sciences. Now of course you do accept Clifford Geertz's criticism [in his article in *Philosophy in an age of pluralism*] that you should also see the natural sciences as interpretation-dependent, but let's just keep this dichotomy you establish working for the moment. So then in *The Explanation of Behaviour* your basic point is to show that action is teleological, and that this is missing from the behaviourist account. So far so good?

T: Yes, yes, that sounds good.

N: This now comes to one of the crucial dilemmas for me in your ideas: the is/ought problem, the "naturalistic fallacy", description/prescription—the relationship between these two in your ideas. So, you argue that the Enlightenment / Cartesian / rationalist / empiricist approach is not only a way of understanding nature and humans, but it also becomes, to use one term you use, "ontologized", it endorses a certain picture of the agent. And in this sense, social philosophy will always be normative. This approach will affect our self-interpretations and thus if it is going to tell us how we are, it necessarily is going to be not just "is" but also "ought". Is that one way of seeing it?

T: Yes, but I'm not quite sure I see the force of the argument there; there are other arguments.

N: Okay, there is another argument to come so I'll just go on and pick this up again in a second. But the question is, "Should descriptive philosophy, should this philosophical anthropology be normative ideally?"

T: My argument is that it can't but be. This is what I try to work out in "Neutrality in Political Science". When you get to the really interesting explanatory language, it's always doubling up as normative. Unless you imagine a science which tries to predict our movements on the basis of nerve-end firings in the cortex by-passing description in terms of motives, then I'm sure it's possible, but that is so out of whack with our understanding of our behaviour. Once you get down to the theory—take any of the great sociologists that have marked our anthropology and sociology, Weber and Durkheim, and so on. For example, take Weber's ideas on charisma, what is charisma. Charisma arises because of a search for meaning and some people help give it. That's presenting the human condition as involving this need for meaning. Now in proposing to have a very fundamental explanatory framework, you're not proposing that it be entirely neutral because obviously a state of utter meaninglessness is not a desirable state. You realize that you can't have explanatory force without incorporating this notion of meaning. What do you mean by

normative? You are developing certain considerations which will allow you, from those considerations, to say how do these explain [?] this condition better than that condition? I mean being in a state of total meaninglessness is not something human beings take well to. It's difficult to see how you can talk about human motivation when you get to that level without using language which is sensitive to the central place of value in human beings' lives. In order to avoid using value-laden motivational terms, you have to either retreat to peripheral motivational terms or you have to desert the motivational field altogether. That's the real reason why the whole enterprise is flawed. It emerges very well in Bernard William's *Ethics* [*and the Limits of Philosophy*] book and is argued by John Macdowell, that, as a matter of fact, that same deep fact about human beings is reflected in their most important value languages, e.g., in their terms like courage and shame.

N: Against the whole Cartesian-empiricist-rationalist-etc. approach and line, I see you making two sorts of criticisms. One is simply the basic validity of the theories—they are not accurate; they just don't measure up to how we actually live and make sense of our lives. Here you have recourse to a phenomenological approach which draws on hermeneutics as a better way of understanding human beings. The second criticism would be that the very style of reasoning and thinking that they support, e.g., Descartes' "immediate knowledge", disengaged reasoning, the neutral stance—all that fundamentally is an *achievement*, not something that is natural or inescapable in human nature, that it cannot serve as an ontological account of how we are, let alone how we should be. Would those be the two major criticisms? Am I missing one?

T: No, I think those are the two. The second one is really a criticism of the epistemological tradition which has been transposed onto the human, that the structure of our thinking actually is like that. And I'm following Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and all those people like that in criticizing it.

N: In your psychology essays you say, "Sure, of course neurophysiological/mechanistic processes underlie us physically, but I want to argue for another level"—the tripartite distinction you give of different levels of analysis [i.e., the psychophysical level, the level of competences, the level of fully motivated behaviour].

Okay! So now we come to you. The purpose of your theory I see as being two-fold. The first one is the most important one. It is to uncover and explain the structures of human agency, and this is guided by, in line with your argument in "What is Human Agency?", the search for the "distinctively human" and not what is common to all agents (e.g., animals, even machines). And the criterion for something being a structure (and again this is found in many of your articles) is that it is inescapable, it's transcendental, for example, the ad hominem argument you use in "Explanation and Practical Reason", the transcendental one you use in "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments". You come clean most clearly in this ["The Moral Topography of the Self"] where you argue for some sort of constants across humanity.

T: Yes, so the transcendental argument is to try and zero in on that constant.

N: Okay, well how much of this is indebted to Kant's conditions of intentionality, because you bring up Kant all the time, his transcendental structures, his response to Hume.

T: Yeah, indirectly. I mean the more direct sources are Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, but we do have to give Kant credit. Heidegger was working through Kant at the same time as he was writing *Being and Time*. I also use him as a reference point because I am often writing for an audience that is mostly Anglo-Saxon philosophically and which has probably but not even certainly read Kant, but not Heidegger.

N: Yes, so there's a strategic element here. But the method Kant uses, going from actual experience to the conditions of that experience, is then used by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.

T: Yes, but I try to reinterpret what that is actually, I mean how you know, what gives you the authority to say something like that, as being something to do with what I call "agent's knowledge". As people who are doing something, we know we couldn't do X without Y. Even in situations where it's not a question of logical possibility or conceptual possibility, I know that I could do this and not this as an agent.

N: This is where I see the method you use coming into play—hermeneutical, phenomenological, interpretational. We'll come back to that. So the second goal/purpose of your philosophy, and this again comes back to the ought, is that you want to try to make sense of how we actually live our lives and make sense of our lives. Talking with Jim, we discussed how with the "reductivists" in large terms, you were able to expose the motives underlying those theories—epistemology , the need for clear knowledge, this idea of control and freedom as the moral motives underlying that project of e.g., Hobbes and Locke. And then we were asking what are the motives underlying *your* project then, the non-reductivist's. Jim said the only thing he could think of is the ideal of self-clarity. But then one could say that both you and the reductivists are motivated by self-clarity; Hobbes and Locke are getting clear on how we *really* operate.

T: What I would mean by that is spelled out in *Sources*; self-clarity as an ideal of the self that is not unconnected with the whole rest of our moral lives in an important way. We enable ourselves to be more fully what we are aspiring to be by releasing the power of what I call constitutive goods that actually shape our lives. So its not just self-clarity without anything else but whatever we feel is important to us more powerfully works in our lives by our getting it clearer. The heart of the notion of getting clearer about something is letting it be as against denying it or suppressing it. And that connects up with the theory of language; all these things connect.

N: You are going to give a picture of the agent which is inescapably normative. That's to say that it is not only how we are, because we are not only physical objects, but we are

also "interpretation all the way down". So if you are going to give an interpretation of "how we are" it is necessarily going to affect our self-interpretations. What comes to my mind most clearly (am I right here?) is that there is this search for the inescapable structures of human agency. That is underlying what you're trying to get at, what you're trying to do here.

T: Yes, that's a very important part of the whole enterprise.

N: Okay, so from what I've read, I'm going to try to give a sense of the structure of the project, a way of looking at it. Here I see that in later articles, you start to flesh out things that weren't there before. So the question here is how has your thought changed over time?—we'll come back to that. Because in your first articles in *Human Agency and Language* I see you there reacting very clearly to an audience of behaviourists, naturalists, saying, "Listen, you've got it wrong. This is not how we actually make sense of our lives. You can't get away from strong evaluation. You can't get away from qualitative distinctions. You have to acknowledge this, so your theories just don't cut it."

And then there are the later articles (I'm thinking here about "Embodied Agency" on Merleau-Ponty, "The Dialogical Self", "Engaged Agency in Heidegger"). Now, in a sense, you share with the Enlightenment-Cartesian-rationalist-empiricist theorists this dependence on, this drawing on this certain reflexivity that has been achieved in the history of humankind. And all your theorizing is growing out of that first achievement of reflexivity. But then you start to flesh out something that is prior to that in these articles: so there's the world as it is independent of us; then there's us, but us prior to reflexivity is the Hegelian life-process prior to Cartesian immediate knowledge (this is from your "Hegel and the Philosophy of Mind"), human beings as beings who primarily *act* in the world, bodily know-how, implicit know-how, pre-understanding, embodied agency, Heidegger's *in-der-Welt-Sein*. And then with Merleau-Ponty, just as you say that qualitative distinctions and moral space is our *mode of access* into this space of ethical questions, that is more developed, that comes after reflexivity. Prior to that, in your

reading of Merleau-Ponty in *La Phénoménologie de la Perception*, perception is our *primordial* mode of access to this world that is prior to us in a sense. That is still prior to reflexivity. Am I on here?

T: Yeah, it could be part of this reflexivity that is lived in a world.

N: Yes, and so at this level we cannot know the structures fully (this is a major point in the "Embodied Agency" article) because we cannot make the focus focal, we cannot fully grasp our way of being in the world. We cannot make what is enabling our being in the world fully explicit, just as later on I cannot make my "frameworks" fully articulate.

T: Yes, well what's relationship between these two? There isn't a relationship of priority. Merleau-Ponty, although he gets to the cultural in the end, starts off just talking about embodied agency, as it might be in the pre-cultural or non-cultural world, in the first chapters of *The Phenomenology*. Heidegger it seems to me now builds his endeavour right away in a cultural context. So in terms of the human being, you can theorize the priority in terms of evolution, but you can't in the human mind. As we live as adults, you can't carve off one from the other. You can talk more about one than the other, and that's what I've done in some of my articles. But I'm not meaning to distinguish some kind of priority, or I didn't come to discover, as it were, later on, that there was this other level. I read very early on both Heidegger and Wittgenstein. It depends whom you are arguing against. When it's about some of the things psychologists talk about, you're arguing really at the level of the perceiving subject.

N: I got the sense that when you acknowledge this, you are giving the background for not only your own project but also those Cartesian-empiricist-rationalist thinkers. You are contextualizing in a sense what it is to be Western. Instead of arguing, "What I am saying here holds for human agency in general", you now show that some of what you're doing, and this is an important issue, how much of what you're doing is Western and how much

of what you're doing is universal. So quite obviously your analysis of the structures of human agency you intend to be universal, but then by talking about these things as being achieved, and some of our stances—e.g., in "Explanation and Practical Reason", you talk about how our understanding of "disencapsulated respect" for human beings, it would be inconceivable in some other cultures for them to even think of it in those terms. So there is this dilemma of how much of what you're saying is Western and how much holds for human beings in general.

T: A lot of the examples, perhaps you might argue *all* the examples, are culturally specific. But what I'm trying to look at is what is universal in those examples. So, for example, I'd be very surprised to find a culture in which there was no reference to, there was no strong evaluation at all. I really don't think such a thing exists. And then if I give an example of strong evaluation which will be real enough to my readers, it's got to be fleshed out enough to be [...]

N: Another example of why I thought this was important, this sort of highlighting that occurs in your later articles but which you say of course is not something you *came* to only then, is the importance of language. Language, as you set forth in "Theories of Meaning", should be seen as *one way*, it's one thing we've developed, it is achieved. And "radical reflexivity" is achieved *through* language. But in your early articles, those in *Human Agency and Language*, you get the sense that language is absolutely essential here, that it is primary. It is primary to articulacy about strong evaluations, but that articulacy is not primary to being a human being. What I got from reading these later articles is that now you are contextualizing language as being itself something that is fundamentally *achieved*. It is not our primordial way of being in the world.

T: Yeah, but something can be both achieved and be primordial. So when we grow up, ontologically/ontogenetically when we grow up, when we become a full human being,

language is *acquired* at a certain point. So there is such a thing as a transition. But nevertheless, in terms of exhibiting what's characteristic of the species, language is central.

N: Yes, I guess I'm thinking of my conversations with Jan Zwicky about Wittgenstein—that language, at the same time as enabling us, it can also restrict our ways of engaging with the world. It sort of colonizes the range of possibilities that are open to us. At one point you argue about how consciousness opens up a realm of possibilities, and one of those things is the fact that things can have significance for us. And this becomes articulated in language. But this path we've taken is one of many paths.

T: That's right because the differences in cultures shows us that. Our particular way of articulating it isn't the only one possible. We know that right away when we encounter people from a different culture. And all of us have therefore been narrowed by our own culture [?]. On the other hand, there wasn't an alternative to this narrowing. The only way to offset some of the negatives of that is to become multilingual or multicultural. There wasn't some moment when you could make these choices beforehand ... Hegel makes a point like this in the first chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

N: Okay. So talking about inescapable structures and how they lead to a theory of moral phenomenology is good, but I shouldn't make this priority between this primordial world and radical reflexivity as achieved and all that. [Right]. So language is essential, as you say in "Embodied Agency", to this whole set of new stances we have, the contemplative, the descriptive, going from "know-how" to "know-that". And now with reflexivity we have the capability of articulation of that background. This I think is true that you want to acknowledge that one of the main problems with this reductivist, Cartesian, etc. view is that they don't realize that immediate desires, knowledge, etc. are all enabled by a whole background of pre-understanding—that *this* is the primordial, the primitive. And this is one of your purposes: bringing into relief this background.

T: That's right, yes.

N: Once we have this radical reflexivity, acknowledgement of its being enabled through language, I see in a way your work as applying this hermeneutical/phenomenological approach to four areas, basically: language, psychology, morality, and politics.

T: Well also social theory and historical understanding, but I guess some of that is part of politics.

N: Yeah, you mean "Comparison, History, and Truth"? [Yeah]. Okay, so from language as signs, as a tool of representation, you want to say that it is also about expression and creating common spaces. Again, you're going into the structures of language that are even "prior" to that idea of using language as representation—this is an achieved state. Prior to that is language as being used to initiate a space between us, as fundamental to expression. And then in psychology, you want to get away from the "classical model", action as "performance", to going beyond seeing humans just as physical objects, acknowledging the need for different principles in different domains, e.g., the domain of fully motivated human behaviour, your tripartite proposal... [Yeah].
Okay, to morality. And to my question on e-mail about strong evaluation. I'll repeat it. You have that reaction to the professor down the hallway [see Appendix II]. You are absolutely furious, but you also despise your reaction, you think it's low. What about if you felt, "No, this is wonderful, it shows my *amour-propre*, my virility" etc. What I'm saying, my point is that there are prior valuations that are enabling you to evaluate something in a certain way. You're committed to macho-ness or virility or you're committed to a certain admirable way of acting. Aren't those prior to the strong evaluation?

T: Now what's the strength of "prior" then? If you mean to say that I couldn't have one without the other, then I agree. But what is the force of priority? I mean, I might

discover for the first time how committed I am to machismo by surprising myself and my friends and not feeling bad, I say "What the hell?". I shock my friends and even surprise myself. I now know that I am somehow deeply into that second-order evaluation. So what's the strength of prior here? That's maybe what's dividing us or bedevilling us or getting me off the track.

N: I'm just trying to get at where do these strong evaluations come from? Where do your commitments and values that enable your strong evaluations come from? Is it just obvious that they come from the culture around you? It's not monologically determined, but you just sort of assume, you start at a certain point and talk about the process of strong evaluation, but you don't talk about this enabling condition of strong evaluation.

T: Well what do you mean by enabling condition? In one sense, the answer is that this process is very mysterious. Sure some of it comes from the surrounding culture. You wouldn't even be introduced to certain issues that only existed in certain cultures. On the other hand, we all know that when we try to understand another culture [...] we may suffer for a long time from the sense of being different [...] So where it comes from nobody quite knows, it arises from a mix of some sense that arises in his or her own life and the culture surrounding. But I feel that I'm not saying enough, that I'm not answering the question. At another level, the where does it come from question, the answer is that it doesn't come from anywhere, it is one of these basic facts of human life, that operate through strong evaluation, so the come from question—

N: So that's the *structure* of strong evaluation, but what about the *content*?

T: Well, the come from question relates to why this particular strong evaluation. The answer is we don't really understand it. I mean, think of somebody who has been very morally innovative, be it St. Francis in one way, or Luther in another, or Nietzche. Okay, so, in the influence industry they are involved in tracing out "he read this, he read that, he

read the other, there was a lot of Christianity in a transposed way, etc. etc." But after all is said and done there is a sort of mysterious element that isn't captured here because all this added up wouldn't make Nietzche! So where does it come from? We don't really understand that.

N: Okay, that's fine, that's sort of what I expected. At some point in "What is Human Agency?" you talk about how we have strong evaluations, etc. and I agree that these are inescapable. But then you move to articulacy. Now just as you get Habermas on "Why be moral?", in your article "Language and Society", why be articulate? Why not just exist and have my strong evaluations? How would you convince me to become articulate about my strong evaluations?

T: No, I think that that is a very good question. And its not a question that can be answered just like that [snaps his fingers]. And that's the spirit of my challenge to Jürgen here. That he sounds as though he has an answer like that, based on the structure of language, and I think there isn't. The answer is not like that, the answer is more complicated. There is a line of answer which is basically Socratic which tries to convince you—let's put in our modern terms—that there is some kind of human realization and self-fulfillment. The unexamined life isn't worth living is of course the famous phrase, but you could put it in this way: that there is some kind of self-fulfillment or human excellence in moving from inarticulacy to articulacy. Another set of answers has to do with what I talk about as constitutive goods and their working in our lives when we release their power, etc. So these are two sets of grounds, but you see they are very very hazardous. Obviously with the already understood structures of human life you can say it follows that, etc. But other than that you have to say this is a very deep question, I'm going to try to articulate why there's a good in articulation. Those would be the lines you would have to go along to answer the challenge.

N: Okay, great. In this problem of articulation, how adequate is language here? Two questions here: what is the relationship between the pre-articulate evaluations/strong evaluations and the Heideggerian pre-understanding? Is there a relationship between them?

T: Yeah, I mean that one is an example of the other. The point about pre-understanding in Heidegger is that no matter how inarticulate you get or we can imagine ourselves being, there is some kind of pre-understanding of how we operate in the world and therefore of the world. And the pre-understanding can be called "pre" because—I mean another way of getting hold of the chain, pulling the chain, is what do we mean by articulation. When we discover something, it's not like discovering that the other side of the desk is full of worm-holes because we have a sense that in a sort of way we knew it, you think, "Uh-huh, I knew that". So when you have articulation you have that sort of experience whereas the discovery that the other side of the desk is full of worm-holes is totally a surprise. So just getting information is a different phenomenon. So now you call it pre-understanding because what comes out of it is understanding, but it's understanding of the form that "I sort of had a grasp of that already" and that's why you flip back and say that what was there before was *pre*-understanding. Maybe the best way of getting of this is some trilogy or trinity or some tri-element thing: pre-understanding, articulacy, understanding. You can try to get at this relationship from any one of the three but you have to hold the three together really to see what the phenomenon is.

N: Okay, and then the relationship between pre-articulate evaluation and language. Are there aspects that are not articulable in language but which are in other media? Language is limited, but are there aspects that cannot be articulated at all in language?

T: Well, that may not be exactly the way of putting it. There are what have to be called from the point of view of this functional account, moving from not really having a sense of it to having a better sense—if that's what articulation means then some sense of what it's

like to be in the world of being a breathing being can be derived from meditating. So that's a kind of articulation which I defy anybody to translate without remainder into philosophical prose. So is there some kind of thing in general which has to be in one—I don't know if we can answer that kind of question. There certainly are these different media of articulation where equivalences can't be established and that becomes a problem because then the theory of language gets messy and my argument is that that messiness is a good rather than a bad because it matches the messiness of the reality of [...]. But language in words has to be seen in the context of the ensemble of "symbolic forms" (Cassirer's term) and the task to do is to figure out what the relationship between them is rather than have a theory of this and this which doesn't take account of the theory of that—which is the stake of the designative theories. I think that gives them a tidier view, but one that is wrong because the reality is not like that.

N: Yes, you captured this well in your article "Peaceful Co-existence in Psychology" where you write, "The point about science is to strive for the degree of certainty of which the domain under study is capable, not to apply an inappropriate model just because such a model would give more satisfactory results *if* it applied."

T: (laughs) Well, actually, Aristotle said that first, in the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (tape cuts off)

N: What new issues are you dealing with now?

T: Well, I'm now working on this whole issue of the secular world, the secular age.

Appendix II: E-mail correspondence — March 20, 1998
(edited transcript)

[The following is a an edited transcript of Charles Taylor's reply to a question I posed to him via e-mail. My question was along the following lines:
In the activity of strong evaluation, where do the values/judgements that I invoke/draw upon come from? E.g., if I evaluate the desire to indulge in rich desserts negatively as not an admirable way to be, as showing a lack of self-control, don't I already have to be committed to being "admirable" or to wanting to be a person with self-control? Well, I asked, where does this prior commitment come from? How does it come about? (This issue was taken up again during the interview; see Appendix I, pp. 136-137)]

I'm not sure I quite understand the question, I mean about an "initial or prior valuation". Does there have to be one? Let's take an example.

I am surprised at my reaction to the news that my colleague down the hall has won the Nobel Prize. Instead of wanting to rush down to his office and congratulate him, I feel like bursting into tears, smashing the furniture, sending telegrams to Stockholm asking why they never recognize genuine talent. At the same time, I DESPISE myself for reacting this way. I feel it's vile, low, utterly self-absorbed, quite petty, etc., etc. I am strongly evaluating it (negatively). Now what do you mean by an initial or prior valuation? Of course, there are other motives here. If I didn't feel hurt at being passed over, wasn't burnt up with jealousy, etc., I wouldn't be responding like this. But that's just what I despise in myself. This despising, this sense of the utter unworthiness of this response, this IS the strong evaluation.

Harry Frankfurt uses "second-order" valuation, because here we have a sort of evaluation of an evaluation. My first-off reaction "evaluates" this situation as disastrous for my *amour-propre* and sense of success. My second-order reaction evaluates this evaluation as despicable. One can construct it this way, but this may not correspond to any temporal

development. It's possible that as long as I've felt this kind of jealousy, I have despised it.

The evaluation is strong because I see it as the kind of evaluation which is not in any way contingent on my desires, or on other outcomes. If someone offered to reduce this sense of shame that I have by making me quite happy feeling this way, I would reject the suggestion with horror. I don't WANT to be the kind of person who not only feels this, but is HAPPY feeling it. No thanks!

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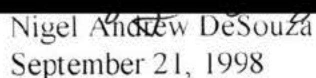
Author 

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