

# Morality, Identity, and Historical Explanation: Charles Taylor on the Sources of the Self

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Let me lay my cards on the table. My intention is to convince you 1) that sociology suffers from and fails to live up to its potential because of its disconnection from large parts of philosophy and interdisciplinary social and political theory, 2) that our aversion to moral discourse (in the name of science) has greatly impoverished our understandings of identity and human agency, and 3) that the recent work of Charles Taylor is perhaps the best starting point for recovering a strong and crucial understanding of the self as moral subject.

A century ago, as Durkheim set out to institutionalize academic sociology, he made the development of a sociology of morality central to his intellectual mission. He intended to rescue moral discourse by displacing the individual. Morality turned, he argued, not on individuals' variant faculties, nor on moral choice as an exercise of free will, but on social processes more basic than individuals. The effect of a moral order was produced directly by social causes.

For the most part, sociologists have not carried forward Durkheim's task of creating a sociology of morality. We have tried to sever normative from empirical discourse even more sharply than he did. We have lost sight of the philosophical problems Durkheim thought sociology could solve. And as a discipline we have become "unmusical" in matters of moral discourse. Yet we remain true to the Durkheimian heritage in our avoidance of strong accounts of human subjects.<sup>1</sup> Even symbolic interactionists have largely abandoned Mead's focus on the self, and those sociologists who have turned recently to address (or rehabilitate) the role of "agency" in human affairs have largely tried to do so without focusing on individual subjects, either stressing instead the more anonymous workings of a decentered collective agency, or sticking to general statements about the importance of agency rather than specific analyses of its historical forms and variations. Conversely, explicitly individualistic sociologies (like the rational choice theory of Coleman 1990) take the individual largely for granted, treating the person as a naturally given entity rather than as a problematic or historically constructed category.

In this context, Taylor's *Sources of the Self* (1989a; hereinafter cited without date) ought to have a major and very salutary impact. It is a book of enormous wisdom, deceptively clear and straightforward in its writing style (if rather casual and meandering), but subtle and profound in its argument. *Sources of the Self* continues a line

<sup>1</sup> Actually, one of the most remarkable attempts to overcome this aspect of the Durkheimian approach came from one of his closest collaborators, Marcel Mauss (1985). Treating "the person, the self" as a category of the mind, Mauss's account follows Durkheim's characteristic neo-Kantianism, but in a broad sense it also foreshadows aspects of Taylor's project here.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor is a Canadian philosopher and political scientist; he also has been an important public intellectual, a founder of the *Universities and Left Review* (predecessor to the *New Left Review*), a vice-president of the New Democratic Party, and a prominent lay Catholic. He is probably known most widely for his books on Hegel (Taylor 1975, 1979), which are among the best contemporary interpretations. Yet though he shares a desire to unite philosophy and history, Taylor is not really a Hegelian, nor is he easy to place on either side of the split between Anglo-American and Continental philosophy. He is, rather, an original hybrid of phenomenologist, Christian

of thought that Taylor has developed in numerous essays focused on human agency, language, and politics (see especially 1985a, 1985b).<sup>2</sup> The theory he seeks to develop is at once normative, critical, and explanatory. Unfortunately, Taylor's vision is not very sociological. He presents us with a history of the transformations producing the modern self written almost entirely through "great men"; he gives little attention to how or in what degree this process influenced, reflected, or was in tension with the lives and thought of women or other men, how it may have varied systematically by social context or position, or how it was shaped by broader patterns of social change. Sociology could have much to offer Taylor's account if sociologists would orient their work to these major issues.

Taylor, however, does offer extremely valuable guidelines and first steps to this potential sociological enterprise. He does so in three main ways (which will form the basis of the three main sections of this essay): First, he shows how deeply flawed any account of human personhood must be which tries to address identity separately from moral subjectivity. Second, he rethinks both practical reason and historical explanation, challenging conventional ideas about how schemes of thought change and in what senses these changes may be described as "gain." Finally, but certainly not least in importance, he develops a substantive account of the making of modern identity, fusing intellectual history masterfully with philosophical anthropology. Necessarily, such a study addresses the transformation of culture as well as of the self. Taylor's account is rich both in descriptions of the work of particular thinkers and in analysis of the overall process itself.

## MORAL SUBJECTS

For Taylor, tracing "the development of our modern notions of the good, which are in some respects unprecedented in human culture, is to follow the evolution of unprecedented new understandings of agency and selfhood" (p. 105). Thus one of Taylor's first tasks is to place the construction of the person back in the center of moral thought. He emphasizes not just what it is right to do, but what it is good to be.<sup>3</sup> Unlike MacIntyre (1984), Taylor does not search for the good life in a neo-Aristotelian model of virtues. Rather he suggests that revitalizing moral theory depends on grasping the nature of the person who will live or aspire to this good life. The making of the modern self has rendered this task much more complex than it was for Aristotle. Further, Taylor's account implies, no reconstruction of the classical virtues can serve the needs of modern human action.

Taylor's claim is not that the self—the person, identity—is prior to morality, but rather that it is constituted in and through the taking of moral stances. This idea runs counter to the predominant accounts in the philosophical literature. It is also different from Mead's (1934) account—probably the one most familiar to sociologists—because Mead takes a basically cognitive approach to the self. Taylor's position is closer to phenomenological and existential thought—Kierkegaard, Heidegger,

humanist, post-Wittgensteinian language analyst, hermeneuticist, and critical philosopher of behavioral science (see, on the last, 1964). Though he is a major figure in contemporary philosophy and political theory, he is hardly known in sociology—save perhaps for his widely reprinted essay "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man" (in 1985b). Aside from the loss of insight furnished by Taylor's own work, this description reveals sociology's general disconnection from the broader discourse of social and political theory and the philosophy of science.

<sup>3</sup> To be a person, on Taylor's account, is more than doing certain things; it is more than mere agency, in the sense of having purposes, desires, aversions, and so forth. "To be a person in the full sense you have to be an agent *with a sense of yourself as agent*," capable of making plans, holding values, and exercising choice (1985c, p. 257; italics mine).

Jaspers, Merleau-Ponty—where the emphasis is more on the necessity of commitment to some direction of action. He is diametrically opposed to approaches that would sharply separate knowledge and action. His main enemy is a “naturalism” which proposes that we are moved not by pursuit of the good but by mere desire, that we can prescind from the problems of action in the world to understand human beings as self-contained objects of scientific study. In this view, it is possible to do altogether without moral frameworks and strong evaluative distinctions. Yet Taylor shows at length that though this view shapes the modern self profoundly, it can achieve no deep understanding of it. A central task of *Sources of the Self* is to show whence this naturalism came, why it seems powerful and sometimes liberating, why it misunderstands itself as “extra-moral,” and what problems that misunderstanding poses.

### *Hypergoods and Moral Frameworks*

Taylor’s starting point, then, is the idea that all human beings act within moral frameworks which enable them to make qualitative distinctions among goods. Adhering to the good of universal respect for all human beings, for example, is different from preferring to eat healthy food or avoid conflict. Commitment to certain “higher,” or more basic, goods provides us with the capacity to locate ourselves, to establish an identity, and to determine the significance of various events or things for us. These “hypergoods” (p. 63) or “constitutive goods” (p. 93) may not be the same for everyone, but everyone must have some.

Hypergoods enable us to constitute frameworks of “strong evaluations”: “discriminations of right or wrong, better or worse, higher or lower, which are not rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations, or choices, but rather stand independent of these and offer standards by which they can be judged” (p. 4). Thus to act within a moral framework is to act with a “sense” of qualitative distinction in which some basic evaluative commitments orient the rest of one’s views and choices. Such frameworks are necessary and unavoidable; they orient us, in positive terms, and they give horizons and shape to our lives by offering implicit limits to choice and thereby making action possible. “The claim is that living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, that stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood” (p. 27).<sup>4</sup> We know who we are only by knowing where we stand.

Moral frameworks vary along three basic axes: respect for and obligation to others, understanding of what makes a full life, and notions of dignity. Familiar frameworks include the honor ethic so widespread in premodern societies; the Platonic notion of rational mastery, which weds reason to self-control; the expressive individualism which stresses the transformative capacity of art and will; and even—paradoxically—the naturalism which denies that it is a moral framework at all, but implicitly gives a strong valuation to freedom, including liberation from our false commitments to allegedly higher goods. Perhaps the most basic transition has been the one—incomplete though it is—from the honor ethic toward any of the others: the shift, to put it in negative terms, from a basic fear of condemnation to a basic fear of meaninglessness (pp. 19–22).

Though the honor ethic is more explicitly social, with constitutive goods such as fame, all moral frameworks must be understood as fundamentally social. This does

<sup>4</sup> In this sense, Taylor’s view echoes Durkheim’s (1897) argument that boundless choice is intolerable and human beings require socially authoritative restrictions to avoid anomie.

not make them less authentic or less personal: “each young person may take up a stance which is authentically his or her own; but the very possibility of this is enframed in a social understanding of great temporal depth, in fact, in a ‘tradition’” (p. 39). Our positions on basic moral questions and our senses of personal identity generally depend on reference to defining moral communities (p. 36). This is obviously and familiarly so in regard to human development, particularly in childhood but also through the life course. Yet even sociologists too often have left the matter there, treating the genesis of personal identity and judgment as a social process but neglecting the intersubjective frameworks within which patterns are maintained. We are always, Taylor suggests, embedded in webs of interlocution; the very language through which we articulate our moral frameworks and identities is always simultaneously relating us to others.

We may sharply shift the balance in our definition of identity, dethrone the given, historic community as a pole of identity, and relate only to the community defined by adherence to the good (of the saved, or the true believers, or the wise). But this doesn’t sever our dependence on webs of interlocution. It only changes the webs, and the nature of our dependence (p. 39).

Being an interlocutor, moreover, is not merely an external relationship but also an internally constituent part of personal identity.

### *Naturalism*

Hypergoods are distinct from the wide range of “life goods” that we may value; they provide the moral criteria that establish why these other preferences are good. This is precisely what naturalism—especially utilitarianism—denies.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Taylor suggests, even utilitarians are moved by hypergoods—particularly ordinary happiness, which they hold to be *the* basic good, and universal beneficence, which they demand of any “good” social order (pp. 336–37). Utilitarians may present their case as though it is simply a matter of neutral science, but describing or demonstrating the possibility of a perfectly engineered society does not give sufficient reason for working towards it. The scientific outlook does not in itself indicate why it is incumbent on us to adopt the scientific (rational) outlook. There must be more to the story. When we ask *why* one should adopt the scientific outlook, or work towards a more perfectly engineered society, the answers turn on (often hidden) moral arguments. One should be scientific because it is the basis for achieving the greatest good (ordinary happiness) of the greatest number of people. The principle of utility thus is not simply one of a number of goods, but a statement of criteria by which we are to judge the goodness of a range of possibly pleasurable acts. It is also part of a moral framework that we are obligated to adopt if we wish to think of ourselves as good people. The reductive psychology of

<sup>5</sup> Utilitarians can get themselves boxed in by attempting to explain the origins and orderings of preferences in the absence of any strong notion of constitutive goods or qualitative distinctions. One common way out of these boxes has been through revealed preference theory—the notion that we simply have certain irreducible preferences which must be taken as given data about each of us. This approach has worked for certain economic analyses, but it risks short-circuiting rational choice theory into easy tautology. Revealed preference theory is similar to the philosophical reduction implicit in many forms of subjectivism—the notion that goods are valuable simply because we think them so, because they move us. From Taylor’s phenomenological standpoint, however, this cannot be right. It is sharply contrary to our experience of hypergoods: “We sense in the very experience of being moved by some higher good that we are moved by what is good in it rather than that it is valuable because of our reaction” (p. 74). To try to get away from classical utilitarianism by this route is to lose touch with the phenomenon of moral subjectivity that we are trying to understand.



utilitarianism may suggest that we are motivated simply by pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain, but utilitarianism is also an ethic. From Jeremy Bentham to James Coleman, its proponents claim that it demands adherence from reasonable people. A hidden assumption, contrary to utilitarian psychology, is that we want to think of ourselves as reasonable people, that we wish to explain ourselves and our actions in a way which shows that we are good people.

All of us, including utilitarians, depend on constitutive goods to show why the particular preferences of our lives are in fact part of the good, or in accord with the good, and to make sense of the disparate moments of our lives, each focused on various particular pursuits. It is because we “ask why,” because we engage in self-interpretation, that we are forced to think about hypergoods. In a sense, indeed, such goods exist for us only through some articulation, though that may be more a matter of collective tradition than of personal self-examination (p. 91). We cannot have an identity without having an orientation in moral space. Conversely, “our identity is what allows us to define what is important to us and what is not” (p. 30).

More conventional views—in psychology and philosophy as well as sociology—locate the self in the infant’s ability to recognize that a mirror reflects an image of its own body, in an ability to steer one’s action strategically, or in the development of a “self-image” that one endeavors to preserve or improve by presenting oneself in a favorable light. All these aspects of the self can be addressed more or less in the same way as other objects of scientific study: “objectively,” independently of any deep interpretations, through explicit descriptions, and without reference to their surroundings (pp. 33–34). Yet the self as defined by orientation to the good, as the product of self-interpretation, as constituted through anger, love, anxiety, and an aspiration to wholeness, as always situated within a community of interaction with other selves, cannot be grasped externally and objectively as the conventional methods of science dictate. In the first place, we would miss too much of what is important to human life. In the second place, science cannot be neutral in this regard. Something of this was seen by Nietzsche and by “neo-Nietzscheans” like Foucault. Yet showing the impossibility of a neutral science, showing that hypergoods have always been inseparable from power, only establishes a kind of mirror image of naturalism. It does not show that we can do without such hypergoods (p. 71).

Ultimately the neo-Nietzschean ethic is based on a hypergood of radical, negative freedom—and, paradoxically, on another sort of naturalism, a post-Romantic turn to the natural life-force and rejection of all normalizing constraints over it. Yet neither neutral science nor its postmodern antithesis will do:

The point of view from which we might constate that all orders are equally arbitrary, in particular that all moral views are equally so, is just not available to us humans. It is a form of self-delusion to think that we do not speak from a moral orientation which we take to be right. This is a condition of being a functioning self, not a metaphysical view we can put on or off (p. 99).

If we cannot approach the self adequately through external objectifications, neither can we do justice to morality by attempting to disengage it from subjects. Value terms, Taylor attempts to show, are not mere projections. Much of naturalistic thought would treat them as such, using some form of is/ought or fact/value distinction to deny them the status of true reality. According to one view, our moral reactions are simply physiological, visceral responses (p. 54). According to another, they are simply optional opinions. Still a third sort of naturalism supposes that we can find some sort of

nonevaluative description that is essentially equivalent to what we say we value (as wavelengths of light are held to be objective equivalents to what we describe as colors). Naturalism thus attempts a neutralization of morality. Taylor's objection is fundamental: "Moral argument and exploration go on only within a world shaped by our deepest moral responses . . . just as natural science supposes that we focus on a world where all our responses have been neutralized" (p. 8).

### *Articulation*

In the name of objectivity, much modern science takes such a narrow view of subjectivity that it ceases to appear significant except as a shorthand for various illusions of practical consciousness. Taylor claims that practical consciousness is a truer guide, though it is typically inarticulate. He calls on us to develop the best accounts of human life we can arrive at—raising the idea of best account to a methodological principle with which to rival other sorts of truth claims. Whereas objectivist accounts try to start outside the meanings that moral phenomena (like identity) have for us, Taylor suggests that we must start from inside. The "account must be in anthropocentric terms, terms which relate to the meaning things have for us" (p. 72). It is thus impossible to separate sharply the explanatory and the practical life uses of terms (p. 58). We must be serious about seeking the *best* account possible, but because we are ultimately giving an account of ourselves (at least in part), we cannot achieve perfect clairvoyance or a fixed perspective outside biography or history. Our best accounts will be provisional, but more general epistemological or metaphysical arguments can only change the subject, address some other phenomenon, not supply a truer approach to morality or identity.

Taylor's project is the articulation of the claims implicit in our moral actions and reactions. For the most part, modern philosophical understandings of the self neglect the insight that we must make sense of our own lives. Instead of treating the self as "an object of significance to itself," they merely recognize self-consciousness as a requirement of full selfhood (p. 49). Yet personal identity is more than just self-consciousness: we are not simply *aware* of ourselves; we *matter* to ourselves in very basic ways.

Articulation is not simply a philosopher's quest but an important part of personal and social life. It is also problematic. In the first place, there often is a lack of fit between what people "officially and consciously believe, even pride themselves on believing . . . and what they need to make sense of some of their moral reactions" (p. 9). So articulation can produce tension with manifest beliefs. Articulation can also change beliefs; it can be the basis for self-critical inquiry. The modern era makes articulation newly challenging.<sup>6</sup> No framework of moral evaluation is shared by everyone: "all positions are problematized by the fact that they exist in a field of alternatives" (p. 317); none can be taken for granted as simply *the* framework. The disjunctures between frameworks call on us to attempt articulation, to make our criteria of judgment and action more explicit. When we do so, we move out of the range of phenomenological certainty that Bourdieu (1976, 1990) describes as *doxa*. Some of us may become orthodox, holding a definite traditionally defined view with

<sup>6</sup> As Taylor observes, "We often feel ourselves less able than our forebears to be articulate" (p. 95). We seem to suffer from a loss of meaningful, adequate narratives. We still draw empowering images and stories from the Bible and other enduring sources, but this is problematic where we have abandoned much of the underlying theology or philosophy. The construction of new narratives is problematic—and is even rejected by "postmodernists"—though that fact has not put an end to the essential effort to make narrative sense of our lives.

the self-conscious sense of standing against some significant contrary opinion. Others may take a pluralist position, holding to one view for themselves but accepting a heterodox range of opinions among others. Finally, some of us may accept any articulate moral framework only provisionally, as an approximate fit to our underlying sensibilities, while we embark on a quest (*pace* MacIntyre 1984, pp. 203–204) for something better.

Our understandings of ourselves are necessarily temporal; we know at some level that life is a matter of movement. “So the issue for us has to be not only where we *are*, but where we’re *going*; and though the first may be a matter of more or less, the latter is a question of towards or away from, an issue of yes or no” (p. 47). An absolute question about whether we are moving in the right direction always frames our relative questions about specific goods and actions. Our concern is not only prospective; we must try to make sense of the lives we have lived, to establish a unity or at least a continuity to our existences: “what I am has to be understood as what I have become” (p. 47). As a result, we must grasp our lives substantially in narrative terms, as unfolding stories. How we construct and judge these stories once again depends on what we take as the constitutive goods in our lives.

In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor attempts to construct a narrative that makes sense of the collective process of forging the modern identity. Like personal fashionings of biographies, its purpose is not simply abstract knowledge but also orientation for action, a historical understanding of current identity as an empowering basis for moving forward in the pursuit of our highest conceptions of the good.

## HISTORICAL EXPLANATION AND PRACTICAL REASON

Taylor’s methodological principle, the best account principle, specifies 1) that accounts of morality and subjectivity must be in terms which make sense to us as active, moral subjects, and 2) that in scholarly explanation, as in practical life, we must go ahead with the best account available at any point in time. We should not aspire, in other words, to epistemological certainty, to final truths. This does not mean simply that we should let our subjective beliefs go unchecked. Rather we need to formulate our best accounts, in terms true to experience as well as adequate to explanation, and to subject them to criticism. In critical discourse and in the challenges of practical life we find out how well our best accounts stand up.<sup>7</sup>

The most reliable moral view is not one that would be grounded quite outside our intuitions but one that is grounded on our strongest intuitions, where these have successfully met the challenge of proposed transitions away from them (p. 75).

The key lies in the proposed transitions.

### *Epistemic Gain*

Traditional epistemology gives us the notion that we are called upon to choose between truth and falsehood—but practical life seldom gives us such easy choices. Similarly, the implicit philosophy of science invoked in much academic discourse

<sup>7</sup> Taylor’s theory inherits a good deal from Hegel—though not the latter’s teleology. Both the stress on the importance of articulation and the notion of epistemic gain as the product of a kind of dialectic show kinship to Hegel.

suggests that shifts between theories occur when one theory is falsified. Yet as Kuhn and others have shown, this rarely happens. Rather we shift from one theory to another, from one moral framework to another, from one self-understanding to another, not when the first is proven wrong, but when an alternative is shown to be better. This is a matter of practical reason, which is “a reasoning in transitions. It aims to establish, not that some position is correct absolutely, but rather that some position is superior to some other” (p. 72).<sup>8</sup> We pursue epistemic gain, not final truth.

This understanding of the way thought changes is at the heart of Taylor’s substantive argument about how we must understand morality and identity (both of which, as noted, are intrinsically temporal and active), and it is central to Taylor’s own approach to historical explanation. Much of the interest of his history lies in the demonstration of how and why moral frameworks superseded one another. In this process Taylor sees epistemic (and ethical) gains, but also a shifting set of moral and practical problems that informed people’s judgments as to what framework or account was best. Taylor’s account is thin on sociological history—accounts of what changed in the world to change practical problems and generate demands for new moral frameworks. Let me concentrate, however, on Taylor’s notion of epistemic (or ethical) gain, for I think it is extremely helpful. One of its best points is that it is genuinely historical: it focuses attention on processes of transition without prejudging the question of whether the whole of any series amounts to “progress.”

This idea of transitions is built into our recognition of hypergoods, Taylor suggests. A new good may be invoked, or a recognized good may be raised in a new moral framework to a more constitutive, more basic status. Both moves solve problems that existed in previous accounts. Yet as time goes on, the new good or the new framework may do more and more service, may become more fundamental to moral judgment. For example:

[T]he principle of equal respect is not only defined through its historical genesis in early modern times as a negation of hierarchical conceptions of society; it also continues on, finding new applications—as for instance today, in relations between the sexes, challenging certain ‘patriarchal’ forms of life which were originally left unchallenged by its early modern protagonists.

This example offers us the picture of a hypergood in which our awareness of its being incomparably higher than others builds on an understanding of its having superseded earlier, less adequate views and thus still serving as a standard by which contemporary views can be criticized and sometimes found wanting (p. 65).

A hypergood provides the basis for immanent critique, especially when it is first deployed to repair an older moral framework, by thinkers who do not realize (or who try to restrict) its full implications. “The picture of moral life in which a hypergood figures is one where we are capable of growth from a ‘normal, or ‘original’, or ‘primitive’, or ‘average’ condition, in which we acknowledge and orient ourselves by a certain range of goods, to a recognition of a good which has incomparably greater

<sup>8</sup> Thus, for example, an adequate account of the modern identity must include an explanation of what its appeal was (p. 203). We do not shift from an established view simply because another one is shown to be available: “What we need to do is get over the presumption of the unique conceivability of the embedded picture. But to do this we have to take a new stance towards our practices. Instead of just living in them and taking their implicit construal of things as the way things are, we have to understand how they have come to be, how they came to embed a certain view of things” (Taylor 1984, p. 21). A historical account, in other words, is the basis not only for understanding but also for change. For example, it is part of how we can contest the individualistic atomism that always seems natural to moderns, placing the onus of proof on challenges to it—including those of sociology (p. 413). Taylor (1989b) argues this view in more detail.

dignity than these” (p. 69). New ideas frequently become radical only for a “second generation,” as their contexts change. Conversely, old ideas may remain importantly (but often obscurely) in the background of new moral frameworks because they were not the focus of rebellions against the old way of thinking. This process of epistemic or ethical gain can take place within a single life time, or within the collective history of an epoch.

Focusing on gain (or on loss, though Taylor does not address that so clearly) rather than on absolutes seems so eminently sensible that it is important to remind oneself that modern epistemology and ethics have taken the latter path.<sup>9</sup> This is the case partly because of the central place that epistemology occupies in modern thought; since the late seventeenth or eighteenth centuries it has been exalted in such a way that ethics (not to mention social and political philosophy) seems clearly dependent on it. Absolutist epistemology is bolstered in many ways by both philosophy of language and habits of linguistic usage. Above all, perhaps, epistemology retains its prominence because it is the means for addressing the representational model of knowledge which is tied to naturalism (Taylor 1987). Philosophical foundations are sought in epistemology, not in metaphysics or ontology.<sup>10</sup> This foundationalism filters into sociology and other disciplines as scarcely discerned underpinnings for their largely naive empiricism. In addition, of course, much recent thought (from the pragmatism of Rorty to the variegated French poststructuralisms) has been sharply antifoundationalist.

Yet here, as elsewhere, the critique comes too close to being a mirror image. In order to challenge the totalizing logic of traditional scientific thought (including social science and such seemingly critical discourses as Marxism) many antifoundationalists not only exaggerate their enemies’ epistemological biases, but respond with a claim to avoid discourses of truth altogether.<sup>11</sup> They destroy all bases for critical evaluation and discourse across fundamental lines of cultural or philosophical difference, putting forward a strong claim that there are no criteria which transcend the splits among interpretive traditions. Taylor’s notion of epistemic gain, by contrast, seems much closer to what actually happens when scientific theories or cultural understandings of the self compete than does either the sharp conventional opposition of truth and falsehood or the fashionable denial of the possibility for meaningful evaluation across lines of basic difference.

### *Cross-Cultural Judgment*

This issue of how ideas change is closely related to the question of how communication

<sup>9</sup> Taylor does not much develop the notion of epistemic loss, though it seems to be implied by his argument. If, for example, the gains of Cartesian rationalism were bought partly at the expense of lost capacity for appreciating ambiguity and particularity (p. 182; see also Toulmin 1990), then the diremption between the traditions begun by Descartes and Montaigne must in some sense represent (and/or respond to) a loss. In most cases, presumably, the qualitative shifts in outlook that Taylor describes involved losses as well as gains. Indeed, his overall account seems to be structured in part by a dialectical notion (generally Christian as well as Hegelian) that eventually we can reclaim a moral consciousness which is more fully articulate (one of the chief overall gains of modernity) and yet is able to respond to the “theistic” and “communitarian” moral sources that have been obscured by other modernist tendencies, including rationalism and naturalist individualism.

<sup>10</sup> At least they were, until seeking foundations went out of fashion. Taylor (1987) stresses (contrary to Rorty) that foundationalism is not the core of epistemology; abandoning foundationalism (as Quine has done) while keeping the naturalist/representationalist model in place perpetuates most of the problems that have been identified under the rubric of foundationalism.

<sup>11</sup> Habermas (see, for example, 1990, pp. 1-4) is an important exception, who argues against the Kantian tradition of epistemology and accepts much of the critique of foundationalism, but insists still on the validity of a procedural rationality—a discourse of justifications—which, like Taylor’s notion of epistemic gain, retains an emphasis on the positive capacities of practical reason.

takes place across cultural boundaries (Calhoun 1991; Taylor 1982, 1984). If we hold to any criterion for strong evaluation—say, a hypergood suggesting that human beings are entitled to universal respect—it becomes a basis for criticizing contrary practices. Such criticism can be quite radical, as indeed that based on notions of human rights and universal respect has been in Western history. A good deal of recent thought, however, including some “poststructuralism” or “postmodernism,” has suggested that a commitment to anti-imperialism and a respect for the deep nature of cultural differences means that it is illegitimate for us to import such evaluative criteria into other cultural settings. This is a strong version of the cultural relativism traditionally important to anthropology.<sup>12</sup> As Taylor suggests, however, “It is hard to see why this critical radicalism should suddenly fail when we get to the boundaries of our own society—boundaries which are hard to draw in any case—and condone the often much more severe lapses we find in premodern civilizations, or instance” (p. 68).

The issue comes back to moral frameworks and identity. Can we really live without either valuing our way of life or feeling guilty about living at odds with our values? And if we value our way of life, and think seriously about it, are there not certain ideas about the right or the good which we take seriously enough that they point out our own lapses to us, and even make us reconsider aspects of our own hitherto comfortable existences? And if we take these ideas of the good seriously enough to reevaluate our own ways of life, must we not in some sense believe them to have a higher standing than merely that of aspects of our own way of life?

When we stand within the moral outlook of universal and equal respect, we don’t consider its condemnation of slavery, widow-burning, human sacrifice, or female circumcision only as expressions of our way of being, inviting a reciprocal and equally valid condemnation of our free labour, widow-remarriage, bloodless sacrifice, and sex equality from the societies where these strange practices flourish (p. 67).

That we can even entertain such ideas is, ironically, a result of our very commitment to the hypergood of universal respect—we are unwilling to think disrespectfully of others’ moral frameworks (at least if the others are distant enough from us). It is also a result of our denial of the special place of hypergoods, a denial that results from the specific trajectory by which we came to espouse our current moral frameworks (whether rationalistic naturalism or its post-Romantic antitheses). The dominant contemporary views were forged largely in a rejection of previous hierarchical notions of the good (and in many cases of the moral worth of individuals, a theme Taylor does not develop much). Thus in the names of freedom, equality, and universal respect, we regard it as domination (or, at the very least, think it tacky) to hold any moral position so strongly that we regard it as incumbent on others. Yet we forget that freedom, equality, and universal respect themselves are moral goods of the same status. It is a misunderstanding not only of moral commitment, but also of the exigencies of practical life, to think that we can escape this problem.

<sup>12</sup> Cultural relativism is not precisely equivalent to moral relativism. One indeed may try to understand other cultures in terms of their own practices and frames of reference, provisionally withholding evaluative judgment and trying to avoid imposing the categories of one’s own culture. There are limits to this approach, however. Anthropological understanding can never entirely escape the use of categories external to the practices of everyday life, nor would it be helpful for it to do so (it would simply become everyday life). What it can do is try to recognize that some goods are understandable only within another frame of reference; in Taylor’s language, they are “internal” to a certain mode of social interchange (p. 66). Thus understanding can be distinguished from evaluation. The distinction is unstable, however, like Mannheim’s (1946) attempt to distinguish “relationism” from relativism. Ultimately, strong understanding involves normative judgment, even if expression of or action on that judgment is withheld. Even relativism itself becomes or reflects a hypergood.

*Proceduralism*

The problem surfaces, for example, in the attempt to achieve universality through reliance on purely procedural notions of ethics. This is, prominently, the neo-Kantian path which has been in the forefront of moral thought throughout the modern era (and which even helps to explain why “ethics” rather than “morality” is often the preferred label). Habermas is perhaps the most important exponent of this line of reasoning today. In his theory of communicative action and its cognate “discourse ethics” (Habermas 1984, 1988, 1990), he tries to ground a pure proceduralism based on the implicit communicative potentials of speech and on the institutional arrangements necessary to realize them. In essence, this position amounts to a denial of substantive goods in order to maintain universalism against ethnocentrism.

In Habermas’s case, the boundary between questions of ethics, which have to do with interpersonal justice, and those of the good life is supremely important, because it is the boundary between the demands of truly universal validity and goods which will differ from culture to culture. This distinction is the only bulwark, in Habermas’s eyes, against chauvinistic and ethnocentric aggression in the name of one’s way of life, or tradition, or culture (p. 88).

Similarly, Rawls tries in *A Theory of Justice* (1971) to remain more or less agnostic with regard to specific goods—he calls this working with a “thin theory of the good,” which means in Taylor’s terms that he rejects qualitative distinctions among goods. Instead he relies on certain procedural rules, making them (and not any particular consequences, such as the generalized happiness of classical utilitarianism) primary. Yet as Taylor points out, this obscures the point of the rules that define the right (p. 89). The most basic evaluative framework, even in a theory worked out as carefully as Rawls’s, remains inarticulate. Rawls must choose his basic rules—his two principles of justice—on the basis of implicit hypergoods; otherwise there would be no basis for his decision that they are adequate to our moral intuitions. Habermas likewise imposes certain hypergoods in his procedural discussion but refuses to give a “thick” description of how they relate to the good life.<sup>13</sup> By trying to enshrine his hypergoods in procedure rather than in substance, Habermas not only makes his theory abstract, and partially inarticulate on its own moral sources, but also places a special burden on his account of human agency. His proceduralist account ultimately turns a great deal on the capacities of the self, though he develops this point very little.<sup>14</sup>

It is possible to understand the heavy emphasis that Rawls and Habermas place on procedure only by seeing how they are responding to problems with preceding substantive accounts of morality. In particular, they are rejecting modern consequentialist ethical theories (such as utilitarianism), on the one hand, and still earlier theories of natural or divine hierarchies of the good on the other. Methodologically, the crucial point here is that the shape of our current moral frameworks is largely a result of the path by which we came to hold them. Particular goods are put into the foreground or

<sup>13</sup> This is part of Habermas’s difficulty in confronting critics who challenge him with claims about the importance of difference (e.g., Calhoun, ed. 1992; Fraser 1985; and, more radically, a legion of postmodernists). He cannot see what they mean by a positive value on difference, and therefore why they are not satisfied by his strong defense of tolerance. To surrender his proceduralism, however, appears as tantamount to a surrender of the basic ideals of freedom and universal respect—which reveals the role these play as substantive hypergoods in his theory. Indeed, as Taylor suggests, the “modern idea of freedom is the strongest motive for the massive shift from substantive to procedural justifications in the modern world” (p. 86).

<sup>14</sup> Habermas’s (1979) use of Kohlberg’s theory of moral development is more an example than a real basis for this theory.

the background, applied broadly or narrowly, because of the particular moral problems that shaped the move from a previous moral framework to the current one, or to any particular adaptation of the current one. To understand the positions we now hold, in other words, it is essential that we understand their genesis. This is as true of the constitution of the self as of moral frameworks.

Because of this basic process of historical transformation of moral frameworks, we can look to history not only for an understanding of our present moral stances, but also for ideas as to what may have fallen by the wayside or may have been shifted from foreground to background not because it was worthless but because of the particular configuration of any previous transition. Indeed, in *Sources of the Self* Taylor is concerned not only to show how our contemporary moralities and selves developed, but also to recover moral sources that we have at least half forgotten:

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 (p. 520).

Historical inquiry is thus important not only methodologically, but also in order to discover once powerful, now hidden moral sources.

### THE MODERN SELF

The modern remaking of self and morality involves, in Taylor's account, several major thematic shifts as well as more numerous reformulations of specific problematics. Most broadly, we need to see the development of a new sort of inwardness, an affirmation of the value of ordinary life, and an investment in the goodness of nature on the one hand and rational mastery on the other. Running through all of this is a trend of secularization, the incremental turn away from original theistic foundations towards other moral sources. Taylor conceives of this as ultimately disempowering, though he finds other gains in many of the specific moves that helped to bring it about.

#### *Inwardness*

The starting point is Plato.<sup>15</sup> It is with Plato that Taylor sees reason and reflection—an ideal of rational contemplation—first gaining dominance over action and glory.

<sup>15</sup> This in itself is interesting, given Taylor's own Christian orientation. His attention is both shaped by traditional philosophical history and turned, I suspect, towards the Hellenic side of the Bible more than the Jewish. In a review essay, Bernard Williams (1990) takes Taylor to task for ignoring the medieval theologians and moral philosophers. Although it is salutary to be reminded that the Middle Ages were not a historical caesura but a period of substantial change, this observation seems to me less telling than Taylor's rootedness in Greece. The medieval philosophers had relatively little direct impact on the making of the modern self and moral order; reference back to their works is infrequent today (except within a few Catholic circles—and I suspect Williams makes his point largely in order to twit Taylor for his Catholicism). Reference to the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament remains widespread, however, and informs a good deal of the moral thought and notions about human agency in relation to God. In an otherwise largely laudatory review, Williams makes much of Taylor's Catholicism, which he regards as pervasive in *The Sources of the Self*, though in fact Taylor dwells a great deal on the Reformation and seems to me to be making a more generally Christian case. Taylor's Christianity indeed may influence the other fault that Williams finds—an unusually benign and optimistic reading of Nietzsche. Yet Williams not only criticizes religion, but makes a surprisingly unsociological assertion: "If religious beliefs are fantasies, how likely is it that they will determine to a very high degree the social or ethical developments that happen in their name" (p. 47)? This seems highly dubious, *pace* W.I. Thomas and Robert Merton.



Homeric Greece, on which Taylor's brief account of the "prehistory" of his story focuses, does not offer a vision of a unitary self; not having centered identity fully on the individual, it does not begin the process of internalization that marks the first step in the genesis of the self as we know it.<sup>16</sup> What Plato brought into the discourse was a notion of the mind as a unitary space. Gods, for example, no longer infuse themselves into humans' lives and persons as they did in the Homeric epics; people are identical with themselves and with no one else. Closely linked to this is the other crucial step made in Plato's thought: the notion that we should take on a responsibility for our lives, acting with rational self-mastery in order to tame our desires and bring our lives into harmony with the cosmic order.<sup>17</sup>

Augustine is Taylor's key transitional figure between Plato and Descartes. He takes up the Platonic oppositions of spirit/matter, higher/lower, eternal/temporal, immutable/changing and recasts them crucially in terms of inner/outer. Synthesizing Plato with the Gospel of St. John, Augustine suggests that our crucial way of knowing God is not through the external objects of His creation—though as expressions of God's thought, these are indeed signs. Rather we must look within ourselves. It is precisely in the activity of knowing that we are likely to find God. This radicalization of the doctrine of rational contemplation explains why the language of inwardness is so important to Augustine. Moreover, "in contrast to the domain of objects, which is public and common, the activity of knowing is particularized; each of us is engaged in ours. To look towards this activity is to look to the self, to take up a reflexive stance" (p. 130). Augustine introduced a radical sort of reflexivity to the Western tradition, for his arguments involved not only taking care of oneself—making oneself the object of one's own attention—but also understanding the world through one's first-person experiential relationship to it. Radical reflexivity involves attempting to experience our experiencing, understanding the objects of the world not simply as externally there but as there *for us*. This approach paved the way not only for phenomenology, but also for the whole modern epistemological tradition. Augustine is essentially the originator of the *cogito* ("I think, therefore I am") that we associate with Descartes (p. 141). Moreover, Augustine was not merely a step on the way; he remains a continuing direct influence. The Reformation was prefigured and shaped by Augustinian Christianity; the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries "can be seen as an immense flowering of Augustinian spirituality across all confessional differences, one which continued in its own way into the Enlightenment, as the case of Leibniz amply illustrates" (p. 141).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> In general, Taylor's accounts of premodern societies are very thin, and little informed by scholarship on societies outside the classical world. This is unfortunate because the transition from an honor ethic to the modern ethical trajectory is so basic to Taylor's account, and because "honor" is a very general term to describe an enormous range of cultural and ethical diversity. Taylor wishes, moreover, to make a fairly strong contrast between the modern and the premodern self. He enters on important but underdeveloped terrain, for example, with the observation that "the very term 'identity' is somewhat anachronistic for premodern cultures—which doesn't mean, of course, that the need for a moral or spiritual orientation is any less absolute, but just that the issue cannot arise in the reflexive, person-related terms that it does for us" (p. 42). I think there is something to Taylor's contrast, and the issue is important, but I doubt whether it is this simple.

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle makes a surprisingly brief appearance—mainly to object to Plato's equation of the order of ends in human life with the cosmic order. Whereas the latter is unchanging, he observes, the former is constantly undergoing change, potentially including progress. Cosmic order thus may be studied by science in a strong sense, while human affairs require more a sense of practical wisdom (p. 125).

<sup>18</sup> We see here the essential reason, which Williams (1990) misses, for Taylor's neglect of the medieval schoolmen. Thomas Aquinas argues from God to created reality through the realm of objects, not through the interior of the person; he does not, in the same sense as Augustine, pave the way for the modern self. On the other hand, we should note that the path from Augustine to Descartes was not straight. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for example, were moved not only by Augustinian spirituality but also by a revived and highly elaborate honor ethic; this ethic, of course, was central to feudalism before that time.

Descartes is Taylor's next focus. He reshapes the Augustinian inheritance by locating the moral sources within us (rather than in God, whom we come to know through inward reflection). Rationality thus becomes not only a basis for bringing ourselves into harmony with the cosmic order, but also a capacity "to *construct* orders which meet the standards demanded by knowledge, or understanding, or certainty" (p. 147). Descartes thus continues to work within the ethic of rational control, but gives a newly preeminent place to our inner capacities, which reorients his ethical views away from the constitutive good of honor or fame. Nonetheless, Descartes transposes inward some of the spirit of the honor ethic: "No longer are we winning fame in public space; we act to maintain our sense of worth in our own eyes" (p. 152). Thus the ethic of rational mastery can internalize several of the specific virtues associated with the honor ethic of warrior aristocrats: strength, firmness, resolution, and control all remain important in the new framework. More complexly, Descartes carries forward the older cardinal virtue of "generosity." But whereas generosity previously had meant "that strong sense of one's own worth and honour which pushed men to conquer their fears and baser desires and do great things," Descartes associates it with a notion of human dignity in general, such that recognition of one's own dignity implies respect for others' (pp. 153–55). The place of generosity is changed because the Cartesian framework interprets reason as involving a push to disengage from world and sensual-active body. This is a pioneering move in modern universalism; it is also a shift from substantive to procedural rationality. "For Plato, to be rational we have to be right about the order of things. For Descartes rationality means thinking according to certain canons" (p. 156). Compared to Augustine, this is a significant shift in the human relationship to God. God is not the basis of knowledge: "God's existence is a theorem in *my* system of perfect science" (p. 157). For this reason, a firm believer like Descartes helped to pave the way for modern unbelief. Thus, on the one hand, new frameworks have continuities with old—albeit with reordered significance. On the other, innovations give rise to lines of thought well outside their authors' intentions or expectations.

It might seem that the mechanistic, objectified world established by the science of Descartes and his successors is quite distant from the radical reflexivity of Augustine. On the contrary, however, this radical reflexivity is essential to the Cartesian withdrawal from the usual flow of lived experience. Descartes breaks with the approach to objects implied by practical engagement in order to attempt to take a "view from nowhere." He does this, however, by reflecting on first-person experience and reconstructing it as the product of external causes acting on internal capacities.

The next steps in objectification of the self are taken by Locke. He rejects first the notion of innate ideas and the inherent bent towards reason that Descartes thought he had discovered. In addition, he sharply rejects teleology. These two rejections give shape to his "punctual self," even more fully self-contained and more self-sufficient than that of Descartes. For Locke the ideas of experience, sensation, and reflection are taken as basic; they are not the products of action and therefore are the necessary starting points of analysis. Minds receive simple ideas; they do not create them.

Locke *reifies* the mind to an extraordinary degree. First, he embraces an atomism of the mind; our understanding of things is constructed out of the building blocks of simple ideas . . . this contributes to a central confusion which affects not only Locke but the whole tradition of the 'theory of ideas': these are sometimes treated as inert objects in the mind, and sometimes as propositional entities. . . . Second, the atoms themselves come into existence by a quasimechanical process, a kind of

imprinting on the mind through impact on the senses. . . . And third, a good part of the assembly of these atoms is accounted for by a quasi-mechanical process of association (p. 167).

Lockean reification and mechanicism are not buried in old pages of intellectual history. They remain current in both behaviorism and cognitive science, each an active school of thought that can trace a direct ancestry to his work.

Whatever its intellectual merits, this Lockean position had important sociocultural implications. It was profoundly antiauthoritarian, for example, because it sharply devalued the received “knowledge” of custom and teaching: “The floating of other Mens Opinions in our brains makes us not a jot more knowing, though they happen to be true” (quoted by Taylor, (p. 167). Locke (and a widespread current of thought to which he was central, and which issued importantly in the Enlightenment) called on us to know for ourselves, through analysis of our own experience. In addition to an ultimately problematic empiricism, this position generated an ideal of independence and self-responsibility. Whatever the merits of authority in other matters, such as politics, it has no say in the exercise of reason. The latter is a matter of logic and (directly experiential) evidence.

The radically disengaged Lockean individual is not only free from the dominion of others, insofar as he (and Locke means *he*) is able to reason autonomously; he is also free to embark on a remaking of himself. A person can examine himself as object, and can institute a program of refashioning this object. Here we have a radical and important transformation of the ideal of rational mastery. The self is located not in any of the familiar features of the personality but in the capacity to remake all of these. The real self thus becomes “extensionless”: it is consciousness virtually detachable from any material embodiment. The self is equated with agency. It is hard to overestimate how central this view is to the modern understanding of the self—and even more to the understanding that informs much behavioral science. Only on the basis of this form of radical subjectivity is empiricism able to carry out its radical objectification of the human world.<sup>19</sup>

Montaigne presents a vision somewhat closer to Taylor’s own (though less social). Reflection becomes an intensely individual “self-explanation, the aim of which is to reach self-knowledge by coming to see through the screens of self-delusion which passion or spiritual pride have erected” (p. 182). The goal is not merely rational clarity but an understanding of ambiguity (cf. Toulmin 1990). Montaigne is as intensely individualistic as Descartes, but this pursuit of self-discovery leads him in a very different direction (though one also indebted to Augustine).

The Cartesian quest is for an order of science, of clear and distinct knowledge in universal terms, which where possible will be the basis of instrumental control. The Montaignean aspiration is always to loosen the hold of such general categories of “normal” operation and gradually prise our self-understanding free of the monumental weight of the universal interpretations, so that the shape of our originality

<sup>19</sup> Ironically, much of the social science that can trace its roots to Locke loses sight of the importance of the idea of remaking the self, and fails accordingly to develop a very strong notion of agency. Thus rational choice theory seldom works with a rich enough notion of human agency to address the ways in which people may make and remake their own preferences, their desires, and their wants. Indeed, to treat preferences as open to remaking by actors is to weaken crucially the extent to which action can be explained on the ground of “objective” or even fixed and externally ascertainable interests. This does not invalidate all the reasoning of rational choice theory, but it shows it to be in need of a much stronger notion of human agency, and also of a philosophy of its own scientific practice which claims rather less in the way of given empirical foundations.

can come into view. . . . The Cartesian calls for a radical disengagement from ordinary experience; Montaigne requires a deeper engagement in our particularity. These two facets of modern individuality have been at odds up to this day (p. 182).

Indeed, though Taylor doesn't say so in so many words, this is the central organizing tension of the Enlightenment, brought into play before the Enlightenment's presumed beginning. A direct line of Cartesian descent runs through all modern rationalist discourse. A more crooked line leads from Montaigne through Rousseau and Romanticism and on to the expressive individualisms of the twentieth century, and even to Foucault.

Despite their divergences, both Descartes and Montaigne are clearly probing the terrain of the modern self. They represent two key themes that henceforth remain always significant, sometimes together and sometimes in opposition: self-responsible independence and recognized particularity. A crucial third theme is personal commitment (p. 185). Taylor suggests a legacy running back to the Stoics as well as to Augustine, but his emphasis here is on the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation took a special demand made of priests and monks and imposed it on all believers. This notion of personal commitment had implications outside the spiritual realm. Not least of all, it helped to pave the way for social contract theory. Because the nature of each thing—or person—was held to be self-contained (and not a matter of reflection of some ideal order of forms), a kind of atomism became more common. Extreme versions added a conception of contracts of association underpinning communal or social life itself (p. 193). The hitherto primarily religious idea of personal commitment made plausible the notion that membership in society and subjection to authority both depended on consent. A closely related seventeenth century inheritance is our modern notion of rights (p. 195). This is a distinctively modern claim focused on the subject as simultaneously particular and universalized, and above all as independent. "To talk of universal, natural, or human rights is to connect respect for human life and integrity with the notion of autonomy" (p. 12).

Of course the idea of the autonomous, atomistic individual was never uncontested. Atomism was sharply opposed by the so-called "civic humanist" tradition, which drew on the ancient republic or *polis* for its model.<sup>20</sup> This tradition helped to shape some Italian Renaissance thought, aspects of English Civil War radicalism, and eighteenth-century republicanism. It lives on in several currently popular political theories from that of Hannah Arendt, who is attracting renewed interest, through parts of the communitarian movement, to some of the discourse on civil society—at least that which is sophisticated enough not to equate this view with capitalism (see Taylor 1990). Montesquieu and Rousseau were, in the short term, the most important social thinkers to reject the atomistic approach. Before we turn to them, however, we need to examine the second major moral transformation that helped to create the modern self.

### *The Affirmation of Ordinary Life*

The first major section of Taylor's narrative establishes not only a turn inward, but also a multifaceted notion of the self. The powers of disengaged reason ground strong notions of autonomy, self-responsible freedom, and universal dignity of the person. The capacity for self-exploration opened an even more basic potential for the making

<sup>20</sup> Indeed, as Taylor (1990) suggested recently, atomism has not only opposed the civic humanist tradition; it has distorted parts of its reception. Thus recent discourse on "civil society" (including that in eastern Europe) has been skewed remarkably towards one strand—an antistate thread that can be conflated easily into a defense of capitalism. The other main strand—that of Montesquieu, for example—is largely submerged and lost from view.

and remaking of the self, and hence a special and nonarbitrary particularization. Finally, an ethic of personal commitment radicalized each of the first two ideas and extended their reach into a variety of religious and secular affairs. The second section complements this account with an equally important and more original story: the way in which an affirmation of the positive value of ordinary productive and reproductive life helped to give rise to transformative modern notions of nature, including human nature.

“Ordinary life,” Taylor’s term for labor, marriage, family, and similar concerns, was sharply distinguished in classical thought from citizenship and the pursuit of the good life. When Aristotle distinguished “life and the good life,” the former was subordinated to the latter. With the Protestant Reformation as its most powerful impetus, modernity overturned this division and made ordinary life a matter of constitutive moral concern. In Milton’s formulation: “To know/That which before us lies in daily life/Is the prime wisdom” (*Paradise Lost*, quoted p. 227). More than religion was affected: to affirm ordinary life was to affirm an equality of access to the moral. This challenged social and political hierarchies because the notion of higher goods had been linked to special stations in life. Science and rational contemplation were no longer separate and higher activities, creditable in and of themselves; they became pursuits that ought to benefit ordinary life. The basis was laid for regarding human happiness (or various of its specific supports, such as wealth or health) as the basic moral good.

Protestants may have been mistaken about aspects of Catholicism. Monasticism often was portrayed, for example, as a “slur on lay life,” because it seemed to imply that only the special lives of those in religious orders were fully Christian. As Weber (1902) suggested, however, the monasteries were forerunners of both capitalism and Protestantism: they emphasized a kind of ordinary productive life and also pursued its rationalization. Be that as it may (and Protestant confusion was no doubt encouraged by the sad spiritual state of the monastic orders at the time), Protestantism placed a special emphasis on marriage (starting perhaps with Luther’s own), labor, and similar “mundane” activities. The particulars of this story are fairly well known, but the positive valuation of ordinary life now seems so obvious that our retrospective visions of the early modern era often fail to reveal how important a departure it was then. We think, for example, of Weber’s account of “innerworldly asceticism” in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, but we place the emphasis on asceticism as an incentive to investment, neglecting the radical revaluation of the whole order of spiritual values that was involved in the new emphasis on labor and calling. We miss too easily something of the ambivalence of Protestants, who were called upon to adopt an ascetic distance from the world, *but at the same time to love it* (pp. 222–23): “Diligence in worldly businesses, and yet deadness to the world; such a mystery as none can read, but they that know it,” as John Cotton put it (quoted p. 223).

Taylor brilliantly shows us the significance of overturning the hierarchies of moral values and with them the hierarchies of tasks and stations; partly because he shifts the emphasis away from the familiar issue of the link to capitalism, he makes us see the redefinition of human agency and morality implicit in the idea that God judges not the kind of activities we pursue but the spirit in which we live our lives. “It is not so much a matter of what acts are special to the good person, but rather how one carries out what everyone does” (p. 279). In the words of one of Taylor’s favorite quotations, “God loveth adverbs; and cares not how good, but how well” (Joseph Hall, quoted p. 224). Moreover, the idea of the calling was not focused simply on otherworldly gains; it was a chance to show serious spirit and diligent labor not only for God’s sake, but

simultaneously for that of one's fellow creatures. We "serve God in the serving of men in the works of our callings," said Hall; each calling is imposed "for the common good" (William Perkins, quoted p. 225). The implications of this attitude are widespread; they include even the growth of notions such as companionate marriage, a forerunner to contemporary understandings of sexual relationships.

It is easy to see how the Protestant innovations intertwined with the more general inwardness and respect for others as beings with similar capacities, as discussed in the previous section. At least partially, however, it was a movement along a different trajectory, and through recognizing this distinct genesis for Protestant ideas we see how a revalued nature came into play. The key lies in the notion of a providential order. Though Protestants upset the old hierarchical notions of order (as contemporary scientists upset the notion of the "great chain of being"), they focused intently on the issue of order. Many, indeed, had a kind of horror of disorder. Within a Calvinist theology of predestination, of course, humans can do nothing to bring about their reconciliation with God. Even so, "the reconciled person feels the imperative need to repair the disorder of things, to put them right again in God's plan" (p. 228). The law was not for salvation but for the effort to rectify the disorder in this world. Outside the realm of predestinarian theologies, an idea of natural law developed, stressing both human dominion over nature and an instrumental conception of the human place in the natural order, which is another version of God's law. Thus Locke suggested that we should follow God's law as we find it enshrined in the workings of nature because nature provides a system of incentives. Puritanism gave way to a kind of hedonism, with God speaking to us through the superlative rewards and punishments, pleasures and pains, that attend our actions in this world. Christianity is thus rationalized and instrumentalized. "God uses our self-love" (p. 241), and with or without God, "Self-love and Reason to one end aspire" (Alexander Pope, quoted p. 280).

Admittedly, Locke (as well as the Deists who followed and went beyond him in this regard) was extreme in his alignment of following God's will with maximizing our pleasures; many more orthodox Christians were scandalized. Yet his idea that the exercise of rationality is the way we take part in God's plan fed directly into the modern mainstream of instrumental, maximizing reason (pp. 242–43). This is the point at which the strain of thought focused on autonomy and on disengaged reason is integrated fully with Christianity; the latter then lends its moral strength to the triumph of the former. But Christianity is thereby transformed; neither mystery nor grace seems any longer to have a very important place in this line of development.

In the intellectual mainstream, orthodox Christianity quickly gives way to Deism during the eighteenth century (and thereafter often to paganism). The Lockean variant of Deism emphasizes a religion of external law. Human beings are conceptualized as autonomous subjects confronted by nature; each can act on the other as a cause. Another version of Deism is linked to the Stoics, Erasmus, and Plato. In this line of thinking, human beings do not stand in quite such an external relationship to nature. Rather, for the Cambridge Platonists, people are intrinsically attuned to God. Shaftesbury, a neo-Stoic, speaks of "natural affection," that binds people together in society—an internalization of a teleological ethic of nature and a transformation of the ethic of order into an ethic of benevolence (that is, we are no longer speaking simply of a proper fit with each other, but of being good for each other).

The most influential strand of this other Deism, however, was the primarily Scottish doctrine of "moral sentiments," for which Francis Hutcheson was the pioneer (pp. 259–65). Hutcheson builds on Lockean psychology, but differs sharply with regard to the externality of nature, with its law revealing the good to rational humans.

Rather, Hutcheson suggests, we have an intrinsic moral sense; our moral judgments and motivations are not derivable from merely prudential ones.<sup>21</sup> Benevolence thus does not depend simply on the system of rewards and punishments enshrined in external nature (or, for that matter, in external society); our moral sense pushes us to benevolence. For Hutcheson, the specific nature of this benevolence was not much different from that described by Locke; both, as it were, are “proto-utilitarians.”<sup>22</sup> The crucial and influential distinction lies in the moral sources on which they hold people to draw. Hutcheson thus foreshadows a long series on espousals of some inner voice of God or nature; it is noteworthy that he speaks of internal morality as present in the form of *sentiment*, an idea that would resonate widely in the versions taken up by Rousseau, the Romantics, and various successors.

Deism is halfway on the road to the radical Enlightenment because its discourse treats God more as necessary to humans than as an awesome or distant creator. Thus, in a sense, Hutcheson’s message is that “the soul needs God to be integrally good” (p. 267). The focus is on human happiness. This is Deism’s development of the Erasmian definition of God’s goodness in terms of His beneficence to mankind (p. 271). But Deism’s rewriting of Christian faith is equally inspired by the antihierarchical affirmation of ordinary life. “The idea that God designs things for the human good took the form of a belief in good order of *nature*” (p. 272). Moreover, “the design of an order for the good of instrumentally rational creatures leaves God no choice, as it were, but to establish laws which he will leave to operate without interference. He shows his goodness in refraining from miracles” (p. 273). Miracles, of course, would impede the human learning process. In this strong sense, Deism therefore depends on the notion of a providential order.<sup>23</sup> In either the Lockean or the Erasmian/Hutchesonian versions, people were called on to live according to nature, which is understood as embodying this good order. This order can be either conservative (“whatever is, is right,” wrote Pope; quoted p. 277), or radical, when getting in tune with nature is interpreted as requiring far-reaching changes in social arrangements. One could reason like Leibniz (especially in Voltaire’s caricature) or like Rousseau. In either case, the notion of a natural order offers a basis for reconciling mere self-interest and the pursuit of immediate gratification with social harmony and long-term maximization. Either God has made the whole so that as a magnificent creation of instrumental reason it intrinsically embodies universal maximization (“the best of all possible worlds”) or everything is made so that the good of each serves the good of all, and therefore the true best interest of each must be to act for the general good. Pope, indeed, introduces both arguments in the *Essay on Man*, concluding “that true SELF-LOVE and SOCIAL are the same” (quoted p. 280).

It is easy to see how we move from these accounts to the arguments of the Physiocrats and Adam Smith that the self-regulating system of production and exchange is a prime manifestation of the providential order (and is morally valuable in terms of everyday life). The instance of Deism is also a good one for indicating

<sup>21</sup> Garry Wills (1978) has written at length on Hutcheson’s impact on the framers of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, particularly Jefferson.

<sup>22</sup> Hutcheson, indeed, virtually formulated what Bentham later would enshrine as the “principle of utility”: “That action is best which accomplishes the greatest Happiness for the greatest Numbers” (quoted p. 264).

<sup>23</sup> Eighteenth-century Deistic thought tended to combine two notions of this order: one, the more traditional idea of a holistic plenitude or meaningful cosmos, the other, a newer, more or less functional notion of the meshing natures of the different entities making up the whole (pp. 275, 277). Louis Dumont (1982) has written insightfully on this contrast. In his terms, the “meshing” notion is crucially individualistic; that is, the nature of the interdependence turns not on the place occupied by each part in relation to the whole, but on its relationships to other parts, including more or less equivalent ones. Leibnizian monads could interact in this way.

something of how Taylor sees internal intellectual and moral pressures transforming moral frameworks, so that successive frameworks genuinely grow out of their predecessors, not merely in reaction to them:

Deist views, however much they subverted or abandoned crucial aspects of Christian faith, could be seen as fuller and more uncompromising expressions of what that faith entailed. In relation to the opponent in each polemic, they could appear as the more full-blooded response. Until, that is, they were in turn trumped in this respect by frankly unbelieving theories, an important part of whose appeal, I believe, came precisely from their apparently more uncompromising fulfilment of aspirations which were deeply embedded in the very religious tradition they were denying (pp. 271–72).

Deism indeed is linked to the overall pattern of secularization that characterizes the modern era (pp. 309–16). Yet this is not simply some external influence; it is internal to the moral discourse. The attraction of Deism was not that it was more secular, but that it solved certain problems or met certain aspirations posed by existing *religious* frameworks. One must see the *advantages* of Deism as a religious view in order to grasp why religious people turned to it. More generally, “secular humanism . . . has its roots in Judaeo-Christian faith; it arises from a mutation out of a form of that faith” (p. 319). At the same time, in this process one sees an example of the tendency observed by Taylor for modern moral frameworks to be in some sense parasitic on the religious faith they are gradually leaving behind. The late eighteenth century saw the beginning of an expressivist theory of nature and human life which in many of its trajectories would lead outside the realm of theistic moral sources.

Obviously the intellectual currents of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were not played out entirely in the realm of theological and philosophical discourse.<sup>24</sup> The new normative significance of nature was visible externally in the retreat of the formal French garden before the new “English garden,” with its stylized provision for closeness to nature. Nature was becoming sentimentalized (pp. 295–302). At the same time, the rise of the novel reflected new emphasis on sentimental attachments, particularly within the family, thus affirming a crucial aspect of ordinary life. The new novels also portrayed the particular in ways not portrayed in previous literature. Further, they revealed a new time consciousness, articulating the meaning of individual lives as narratives within the broader chain of world events and in the unfolding of their own particulars (pp. 286–89). In turn, the new emphasis on feeling no doubt influenced the religious revivals of the period, from Pietists to Wesleyan Methodists and Chassidim (p. 302).

### *The Voice of Nature*

By the end of the eighteenth century, the affirmation of everyday life and the modern notions of subjectivity were breaking free from the idea of a providential order. At the same time, moral frameworks were developing away from theism. Expansion was taking place along two frontiers, each subject to contestation as soon as it was opened. Indeed, according to Taylor’s account, each of the new lines of moral sources was subject to challenge in a way theism was not. Although theism might be challenged as to its truth, there was generally no doubt that those who embraced it would find it a

<sup>24</sup> Taylor’s discussions of aesthetic and other realms, however, are really only asides in his mainly philosophical narrative; they illustrate rather than inform his argument.



fully adequate moral source.<sup>25</sup> The two new frontiers, however, were often found wanting in this regard, even by those who adhered to their conceptions of the constitutive hypergoods. One frontier developed further the notion of disengaged reason, the other the goodness (and internal accessibility) of nature. The two together constituted the moral basis for the radical Enlightenment.

Compared to conventional histories of ideas, Taylor's account somewhat downplays the significance of the Enlightenment. It remains pivotal, but perhaps not the central pivot of modernity for which it is often taken. In the first place, Taylor locates much of the action earlier, in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.<sup>26</sup> Second, he rightly does not lose sight of the complexity of the moral currents of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when Romanticism followed hard on the heels of the Enlightenment's seeming triumph (and to some extent hearkened back to earlier moral frameworks, such as those of Spinoza and Shaftesbury; p. 313). Last but not least, Taylor sees in typical Enlightenment philosophy not a march out of darkness but a step beyond moral self-understanding; in this era the attempt to deny the need for hypergoods and strong moral evaluations first comes to the fore. All this is not to say that Taylor is not sympathetic to most of the key Enlightenment figures, or that he does not see epistemic gain in their thought. But it is to suggest that he wants somewhat to reduce the stature of the Enlightenment, both as moral model and as archetype of modernity.

The radical Enlighteners, in Taylor's view, are essentially utilitarians. They focus on how to maximize happiness and they base their judgments on the consequences of any act, not on its fit with a preexisting order (p. 321). Ironically these utilitarians, who rejected the constitutive good of Deism, the providential order, remained (if anything) more strongly committed to the life goods that this order had underpinned: self-responsible reason, the pursuit of happiness, and the ideal of universal and impartial benevolence (p. 322). For most of the radical Enlighteners, the move away from Deism was based on the notion that evidence speaks directly to reason—and says nothing about God. Thus figures such as Descartes were simply introducing an unnecessary hypothesis when they spoke of God. What Taylor finds faulty in this reasoning is not the turn away from theism as such, but the assumption that there is such a thing as reason unsituated with regard to constitutive goods (and, as that implies, disengaged from being-in-the-world).

Be that as it may, the radical Enlighteners replaced God with a naturalism which they held to be simply empirically correct, of course, and which they regarded not as a matter of hypergoods, of qualitative distinctions, but rather as an equal recognition of all human desires. Pleasure ceased to be a general and abstract category and was increasingly constituted as a cornucopia of sensualism. "Sensualism was what made Enlightenment naturalism radical. Taking one's stand in raw human desire was a way of calling to account all the established systems of law, politics, and particularly religion. Do they require the suppression of the universal and necessary demands of nature" (p. 329)? In fact, a sort of hypergood was being made of the free expression of "natural" desires. Yet from the

<sup>25</sup> Actually, I do not find Taylor convincing on this point. I think it may be true that doubts about the moral adequacy of the new sorts of moral sources are greater, but it seems to me that earnest believers often have been troubled by questions as to whether their belief provided them with adequate moral sources. The issue seems to be at least as much 1) the kinds of demands we place on our moral sources and 2) the extent to which our social and cultural orders in general encourage certainty of convictions, as it is simply whether we adhere to theistic sources.

<sup>26</sup> Emphasizing the importance of the seventeenth century is currently fashionable; see, for example, Toulmin (1990).

protagonists' point of view, this was a liberation from all the previous restrictions on human nature carried out in the name of various (usually religiously inspired) hypergoods. In this sense, for all their anti-Enlightenment, postmodernist rhetoric, recent cultural figures such as Foucault, Lyotard, and Derrida in fact have been carrying on a core tradition of the Enlightenment. They differ from Habermas, the self-declared champion of Enlightenment, chiefly in terms of a commitment to substantive rather than procedural guarantees of freedom and in terms of a bias in favor of particularism rather than universalism.

Not only hypergoods but also the less attractive side of human desire was to be overcome by the progress of scientific reason. By virtue of its disengagement, rationality would allow access to a universal standpoint, helping to overcome egoism and imprisonment in the self. The core of Taylor's "philosophical" criticism of the radical Enlighteners is that "their motivations and aspirations can't be easily stated within the terms allowed by their theories of human nature" (p. 332); the utilitarian Enlightenment is shot through with performative contradiction because it speaks from a moral position that it can't acknowledge (p. 340). There is no way to explain in positive terms why the fulfillment of our ordinary desires and the pursuit of universal benevolence should be taken as ideals (though negative explanations concerning the evils of various competing moral frameworks could be and were adduced).

I think Taylor is right on this point, but it is not clear to me why he thinks it so damaging to the radical Enlightenment. It seems to me mainly to mean that the radical Enlightenment theories are unstable (as were, for example, their Deistic predecessors). The push to fulfill some of their aspirations—such as those implied in the pursuit of scientific knowledge—could generate a damning internal critique or could work along with other influences to pose a challenge (as happened, for example, in the combination of post-Romantic and classical Enlightenment elements in the original Frankfurt School critique of Enlightenment; see, for example, Adorno and Horkheimer 1972). Certainly many believers in the Enlightenment scientific method and its promise of deliverance labor on without developing an internal critique or listening to any of the external ones, but, as Taylor notes, "not everyone is living by views which have evolved recently" (pp. 496–97); there are also Christian fundamentalists who have missed out on a good deal of epistemic gain. Part of the issue may be that the Enlighteners promised (and keep on promising) to be so much better on this score, so true to the ideals of self-criticism as part of the exercise of reason, so true to the pursuit of knowledge, that their willingness to be blinkered is particularly galling. It also may be that Taylor regards them as the most basic enemies of his own advocacy of theistic moral sources.

Taylor does see another version of the Enlightenment, one which does not fall into the problems of utilitarianism. This is essentially an outgrowth of the moral sentiments theme in deism. Hume comes as close as anyone to fitting the ideal type he constructs (pp. 346–47). The basic idea is that we should not expect to find a capacity to ground our reasoning in absolutes or external perspectives or scientific means for freeing ourselves from arbitrariness. Rather we should reason from within the human life form, recognizing that within this form, humans are irresistibly given to accord certain things significance. "Certain matters are the invariable objects of moral sentiments, which are by their nature marked off from others by their unique significance" (p. 346). So, for example, we accord human life a basic significance because in practical terms we cannot see it in any way except as significant—given an undistorted and illusion-free grasp on our lives (p. 341). On this account we still do not have the strong moral source of theism, but there is no reason why we could not treat

such a construal from necessity as a moral source. If this is part of our best self-interpretation, then is a sufficient ground for letting it be constitutive of our moral stance. Here, somewhat surprisingly, Taylor draws on Nietzsche's idea of "yea-saying," an originary self-affirmation and affirmation of nature (based, Taylor implies, on recognition of inherent goodness; p. 343). This is not Taylor's path, but it is a viable one, he suggests, and moreover one which has been followed by a number of nonutilitarian Enlightenment thinkers, perhaps down to Wittgenstein. This "other Enlightenment" need not forfeit the general Enlightenment focus on progress, though it may be somewhat less sanguine about it. Participating in the process of enlightenment still holds out a basis for giving one's own life significance by playing a part in a chain of progress (p. 352).

Another variant of nonutilitarian Enlightenment naturalism takes a slightly different path, and one which widens into a broader road. This is the strategy of reasserting some form of strong evaluation, rejecting the previous leveling process. This starts, interestingly, with a proposition about the greater complexity of the self than typical Enlightenment psychology allowed. Rousseau of course is the first key protagonist, resisting the notion of a one-dimensional picture of the will and asserting instead that good and evil are in conflict in the human breast (p. 355). In Rousseau's view, as in Augustine's, there was a place for real depravity; no increase in knowledge or enlightenment could promise to eradicate evil. In order to deal with this inner tension, we need to have recourse to the inner voice of nature, our conscience. The enlargement of our sense of this inner voice is indeed one of Rousseau's key contributions, and it positions him at the starting point of a central modern trend (p. 361).

In fact, Rousseau in a sense is deepening the inwardness already established as part of the modern self and accentuating its autonomy not by claiming the status of punctual monad, but by proposing a natural capacity for virtuous self-identity that needs to be cultivated. This is the significance of his saying that conscience "speaks to us in the language of nature" and that "it speaks to everyone, but very few hear it" (pp. 357-58). Their listening is occluded by the demands of society, including especially the escalation of wants and the dependence on others which stems from those wants. Rousseau's proposal is not to return to some presocial stage, but rather to cultivate the capacity to attend to nature in a being endowed through social life with language and reason. Though Rousseau reintroduces a hierarchy of goods, he does not accept any hiatus between the life of the citizen and the pursuit of the means of life (p. 360). On the contrary, the hierarchy he proposes distinguishes the superlative good of the general will from ordinary beneficence, and that in turn from evil. The higher good is manifest in a unity to be discovered within the self, between the human being and nature, and among human beings; such a unity must be founded on freedom and recognition of true identity through attention to the inner voice of nature.

Kant follows Rousseau in defining freedom and morality in terms of each other. His most striking innovation is the strong formalism of his insistence that morality not be defined in terms of consequences but rather in terms of motivation.

This amounts to freedom, because acting morally is acting according to what we truly are, moral/rational agents. The law of morality, in other words, is not imposed from outside. It is dictated by the very nature of reason itself. To be a rational agent is to act for reasons. By their very nature, reasons are of general application (p. 363).

Mere physical desires do not count as truly and intrinsically one's own; only the principled demands of reason can be accepted as the products of true freedom and

morality. The special dignity Kant accords to rational agents is central to his moral framework. This obligates us to treat all rational agents with respect. Yet we must be true to the moral sources which we find within us, and which are reached by the use of our reason. External assessments of arrangements to produce human happiness can have no independent weight with us.

If Kant represents a rationalistic development out of Rousseau's deepened inwardness, Romanticism (both English and German) follows Rousseau's emphasis on nature as an inner source. The emphasis is on becoming responsive to one's inner voice, understanding with feelings as well as with intellect. Sentiments are not merely motivations; they define ways of life and action. In this sense Romanticism represents an expressivist turn: we must find and articulate the nature we find within us. At the same time, this introduces a focus on the aesthetic into the realm of ethics or morality. Sensual immediacy is a key Romantic ideal, for example, and one in which the emphasis is not on the external qualities of an object, but on the quality of the experience evoked. Developments in the aestheticization of experience or action mark divergent developments from the mainstream of Romanticism: pure sensualism or the self-affirmation of Nietzsche (p. 373).

Romantic expressivism lays the basis for a new and fuller individuation. No longer are differences among people simply variations on the same, common human nature, or simply classifiable as good or bad. "Rather they entail that each one of us has an original path which we ought to tread; they lay the obligation on each of us to live up to our originality" (p. 375). This idea is central in modern culture—at least as much so as any product of the rationalist Enlightenment. "Expressive individuation has become one of the cornerstones of modern culture. So much so that we barely notice it, and we find it hard to accept that it is such a recent idea in human history and would have been incomprehensible in earlier times" (p. 376). Originality becomes a vocation. This expressivist search for inner essences is not limited to human individuals; Herder drew on it classically in developing his notion of nationalism: different peoples have their own ways of being human, and should not betray them by aping others.

Art takes on a new and double significance in Romanticism. In the first place, art is privileged as a particularly profound participation in the experience of expression. The artist is called upon to create new forms that make it possible to articulate hitherto inchoate visions. Matter and form interpenetrate completely; the aesthetic object cannot be subordinated to any concept. Indeed, the Romantic order itself cannot be grasped by disengaged reason; it is available only internally to full participants. Moreover, art is privileged not only in the production of external objects, but also as the medium (and paradigm) for remaking the self. The person of the artist takes on a central significance, for the artist is not vehicle of mimesis but origin point. Even "nature" is not only not copied; it is also not properly existent outside the artist's creative production of it (p. 381). Art is required to "let the forms of nature speak directly, their power released by their ordering within the work of art" (Caspar David Friedrich, quoted p. 381).

Both the Kantian and the Romantic positions, according to Taylor, are responses to a perceived one-dimensionality of the standard Enlightenment view, to a failure to show what makes life significant.<sup>27</sup> Enlightenment naturalism is actually a neutralization of nature, and thus is the antithesis of the Romantic idea of nature as source (an idea

<sup>27</sup> It is a minor oddity of Taylor's account (but not altogether implausible) that he wants to hold Kant out of any more common identification with the Enlightenment and instead to see him as a development out of it, parallel to Romanticism. The position in itself is plausible, but one of its effects is to allow Taylor to draw the lines of membership in the Enlightenment around the utilitarians much more narrowly than is customary.

not strictly limited to the Romantics, however that term is defined). The Romantic era bequeaths us basic aspirations towards unity: “bringing us back in contact with nature, healing the divisions between reason and sensibility, overcoming the divisions between people, and creating community” (p. 384). Such considerations did not move Kant comparably, though “just because it is a theory of freedom, the Kantian moral philosophy finds it hard to ignore the criticism that the rational agent is not the whole person” (p. 385). Conversely, Romantic expressivism is also a theory of freedom, and so cannot ignore that a simply unity with nature would be a negation of human autonomy. The great thinkers of this tradition strove for an expressive unity that would not do violence to autonomy. There developed the notion that the breach of reason with nature was a necessary one, without which humanity could not have gained reason, a secular version of the Fall from Eden. Nonetheless, “the modern subject is no longer defined just by the power of disengaged rational control but by this new power of expressive self-articulation as well—the power which has been ascribed since the Romantic period to the creative imagination. . . . A modern who recognizes both these powers is constitutionally in tension” (p. 390).

### *After the Watershed*

These two big and many-sided cultural transformations, the Enlightenment and Romanticism with its accompanying expressive conception of man, have made us what we are. . . . We are still visibly working out their implications or exploring possibilities which they opened up for us. We still await another such large-scale cultural upheaval which might carry us out of their orbit, as we sense ourselves to have already departed from the orbit of Deism, Lockean or Hutchesonian, let alone such 17th-century notions as the divine right of kings (p. 393).

In other words, all talk of “postmodernism” notwithstanding, today there is a substantial continuity with the moral discourse and the constitution of the self typical of the last century. Taylor is quite right in this, I think; one of the benefits accruing from his book is greater clarity about the nature of a watershed transformation of culture (and thereby the reasons to think recent changes do not amount to one).

This is not to say that there is nothing new since the Enlightenment and Romanticism, of course; only that there are certain basic continuities. For example, there is the new and important phenomenon of large-scale citizens’ movements mobilizing around moral issues, with the intent of effecting political change. This was pioneered in the late eighteenth and especially the nineteenth centuries—for example, by antislavery activists. Yet though the phenomenon has grown and become more institutionalized, it remains founded on the basic Enlightenment notion that we have a moral obligation to reduce suffering (pp. 394, 396). Similarly, we clearly echo Romantic notions of personal fulfillment when we justify contemporary capitalism: “The wheels of industry turn in order to give individuals the means for a rich and satisfying private life” (p. 458). Not only the two influences but also the reaction that shapes their relationship remains current. We still turn to “interiority” as a recourse against the leveling of qualitative distinctions in the world; we crave in sensibility and consciousness proof that not all of life can be assimilated to the machine (p. 460).

The narrative of secularization has continued to inform the contemporary era, though neither so uniformly nor through such simple causes as is often supposed. Belief did not simply give way before scientific rationality, nor did it necessarily fall

victim to industrialization and the development of our mobile, technological society (p. 402). In the first place, belief has hardly vanished. In the second place, any good account of its travails, as Taylor shows, must be able to make sense of the internal dimensions of the transformation of moral sources as well as of the external challenges to moral frameworks (which challenges perhaps are never sufficient causes of change.) In this case, the early modern era's heavy investment in an attempt to prove the existence of God through an argument from design set up a great many of the ensuing crises of faith. Similarly, we need to remind ourselves that religion and various "secular" lines of thought continue to inform each other; even where contradictions seem apparent to some specialists, they may not be taken as such by lay believers. Thus the clear vision of scientific reason, the Rousseauian or Romantic inner impulse of nature, the Kantian good will, and the vision of essential benevolent will or human goodness have all been held to be substitutes for the theological notion of grace. In practice, however, they have been as readily adapted into lives of faith as upheld outside religion.

Much the same thing could be said of nationalism, another fruit of Romanticism in modern politics. Nationalism builds on Rousseau's notion that the locus of sovereignty must be a people—an entity constituted by a common purpose or identity, something more than a mere "aggregation" (p. 415). This was carried forward by Herder's idea that each *Volk* had a special character to express. The results, however, could be paradoxical. The Nazi regime was brought to power partly by appeals to expressive integrity against instrumental reason. Though it glorified peasant life, its practice was a ruthless application of instrumental reason (p. 415).

Romanticism emphasized a special, "epiphanic" notion of art. Art issued from a privileged form of access to otherwise inaccessible spiritual sources. Through art, inner qualities could be revealed, defined, and cultivated. For the Romantics, the point was often to show spiritual reality shining through the manifest object of art. The Romantic ideal underwent transformations with the symbolists and ultimately with various sorts of modernists. The work of art retained its epiphanic quality, its capacity to reveal basic spiritual sources, but it was now self-contained. Those spiritual sources were in the work of art itself; they were not represented by it, or made to shine through it. In this guise, art has been able to take the place of religion for many of our contemporaries (p. 422). But though approaches to art, like all other moral frameworks, can be shown to depend on hypergoods, these are no longer linked to the idea of the good as such. The potential for disengaging "beauty" from "good" had been present since the eighteenth century; it was a step that Kant approached but never took. In the later nineteenth century, however, the artistic epiphany begins to become an end in itself, a religious experience for its own sake. Poets disrupt reference, trying to take language beyond discourse. Artists try to express nature as a source of life untamable by the good, or they strive for epiphanies in impersonal forms or evocations of infinity. All of this remains intensely subjective; for most, nature remains the key source, but it is a source of sheer energy as much as of morality.

Reactions to (and partial appropriations of) Romanticism continue to inform art (and self-making) on through realism, impressionism, and much of modernism. It is transformed each time, and ultimately even its most defining content is negated, when machines are celebrated and epiphanies are found in the antinatural. Yet through all of these transformations, even those of Baudelaire or the Futurists, art remains epiphanic and overwhelmingly subject-centered. Indeed, as Taylor remarks, "subject-centeredness is a much more insidious thing than the thematic penchant for self-expression" (p. 429). In this way, even the sharpest anti-Romantics carried on the

repositioning of the self that Romanticism had made central.

This tendency is nowhere more obvious than in the German tradition of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (pp. 441–47). Here nature remains a source, but now source of wild, amoral energy. Art is the vehicle of transfiguration. Art can even “justify” reality. The wilds of amoral nature are within us, of course, as well as in the hinterlands. Civilization can reach only so far in either case. For many, this is a liberating claim, “a further enrichment of our sense of the inner depths of a human being, a renewed sense of our link with the whole of nature, but as a great reservoir of unbridled power, which underlies our mental life” (p. 446). The prefiguring of Freud is as obvious as the breadth of impact of this vision, not only on art of all sorts but on the whole of contemporary culture.

This does not just resonate with our contemporary sense of self; it empowers it. Yet there is also a problem. Taylor describes it as the question of whether we are able to “see that it is good” (p. 448). In other words, can we look on our creation, like God on His, and affirm it? Part of Taylor’s suggestion is that the very capacity to affirm is itself crucial; this is not merely a question of evaluation. We are called upon to discover moral sources strong enough to enable us to find and affirm the good in our world. These sources may come altogether from within us, from some vision of nature, or from God.

Alongside our dignity as disengaged, free, reasoning subjects, alongside our sense of the creative imagination as a power of epiphany and transfiguration, we have also this idea of an affirming power, which can help realize the good by recognizing it (p. 454).

Here Taylor sees what he regards as the “Christian resonance which remains paradoxically in Nietzsche in spite of his virulent opposition to Christianity . . . his aspiration to affirm the whole of reality, to see it as good, to say ‘yes’ to it all” (p. 452). Whether Nietzsche’s yea-saying and will to power amount to a seeing of the good is a hard question. Certainly, though, Nietzsche did break with Schopenhauer’s pessimism. Taylor’s emphasis on this view of Nietzsche is interesting, however, not only for its demonstration of his general point about the importance of affirmation, but also for the contrast it offers to the typical French poststructuralist reading of Nietzsche. Derrida and Foucault want to disclaim any notion of the good. Certainly Nietzsche rejected the Enlightenment ethic of benevolence (p. 516); it is much less clear that he rejected all accounts of the good. Derrida and Foucault ultimately are celebrating the potential freedom and power of the self. Yet according to Taylor, of course, this is still a hypergood, although a hypergood remarkably unrecognized: “the underlying ideal is some variant of that most invisible, because it is the most pervasive, of all modern goods, unconstrained freedom” (p. 489). Of course, this freedom is utterly self-related, despite all the talk of difference and alterity. In the hands of a Lyotard, it becomes “postmodernism,” but that is revealed simply to be a “prolongation of the least impressive side of modernism” (p. 489).

By the high modernist early twentieth century, subjectivism and antisubjectivism were pushing forward side by side, nurtured by the same roots (p. 456). “Dionysiac” and “Apollonian” versions of modern existence both were enshrined. The “decentering of the subject” now familiar from the works of Foucault and the so-called postmodernists was a vital theme of the modernist era, of Joyce, Proust, and Musil (Calhoun 1990). As Lawrence said, “Our ready-made individuality, our identity, is no more than an accidental cohesion in the flux of time” (quoted p. 463).

And so a turn inward, to experience or subjectivity, didn't mean a turn to a *self* to be articulated, where this is understood as an alignment of nature and reason, or instinct and creative power. On the contrary, the turn inward may take us beyond the self as usually understood, to a fragmentation of experience which calls our ordinary notions of identity into question, as with Musil, for example; or beyond that to a new kind of unity, a new way of inhabiting time, as we see, for instance, with Proust (p. 462).

Decentering is not the alternative to inwardness; it is its complement.

Modernist art has continued to pursue epiphanies, but often indirect ones; it has worked not by producing transcendent objects but by offering "frames" or "constellations": "its elements don't express what they indicate; they frame a space, and bring something close which would otherwise be infinitely remote" (p. 478). This very sense of remoteness is a sign of current or incipient crisis. Even art is failing to produce the sense of contact with fundamental sources of morality or energy that it did previously.

## CONCLUSION

Three areas of tension or potential breakdown threaten modern culture, according to Taylor. The first is the uncertainty and division about constitutive goods that is hidden under the manifest agreement on moral standards. In Taylor's view, we have been living a long time with moral frameworks whose constitutive goods we no longer affirm. In particular, we have been drawing our ideas of the good, and many of our moral sources, from religious traditions that no longer command our belief. Most of us continue to affirm standards of justice and benevolence, but on what moral sources? For Taylor, the best answer to the challenge is the theistic hypothesis, the finding of a moral source in God. He doesn't mean going back to some earlier form of belief as such. On the contrary, we are all too deeply implicated in the modern identity for that. Rather, Taylor means finding in faith in God a moral source adequate to work through the crises of modernity, a potential basis for incorporating the epistemic gain of the modern era within a new moral framework. It is worth remembering that Taylor sees even "our present tentativeness, our loss of a rooted certainty" in religious and moral matters to be an epistemic gain (p. 312).

The second impending crisis is the conflict between disengaged instrumentalism and the Romantic or modernist protest against it. The third is the question of whether our moral standards are not incompatible with our personal fulfillment, whether morality doesn't exact too high a price from us in terms of wholeness. Taylor has two main points to offer with regard to both of these areas. His main answer here is that there is an essential, necessary diversity of goods. Life is many-leveled, not unitary. Despite the common assumption to the contrary, there is really no strong reason why we should put all our moral claims on a single basis. Likewise, modernity has placed a high premium on consistency; but on what basis should we expect the various goods we hold dear to be consistent with each other? In fact, overzealous pursuit of consistency may be one of the enemies of wholeness. The fact that goods may be in conflict does not necessarily invalidate any of them. Neither are goods automatically invalidated by the evils that have been done in their names. "The dignity which attaches to disengaged reason is not invalidated when we see how expressive fulfilment or ecological responsibility has been savaged in its name" (p. 502). We need to recognize and address the tensions among goods, not simply to invalidate some those which are in contest.



This seems sound advice, and Charles Taylor makes a wonderful ethical guide. But I have been enthusiastic enough about his book to merit reversing convention and closing on a note of worry. Throughout *The Sources of the Self*, Taylor suggests the crucial importance of not detaching intellectual history from social, political, and economic change. He recognizes that philosophers are not necessarily the originators of the ideas they articulate, and he remarks on the difference between a history of intellectual elites and broader sociocultural history. Nonetheless, *Sources of the Self* is a book almost exclusively about those intellectual elites, written with no more than passing reference to some very important sociological factors and questions.

The relationship of social change to change in persons and moral frameworks remains largely an enigma. Taylor hints occasionally at the relevance of capitalism as a force encouraging aspects of modern individualism, but that is not really a part of his explanatory framework. Neither is the institutional change that reshaped the discursive contexts in which new ideas about self and morality are put forward. Taylor notes the role of the eighteenth-century novel, but not the rise and partial popularization of the university, the expansion of the reading public, the spread of new media, and other such trends. What of the many factors that have changed the way individuals relate to each other and the tasks they need to accomplish in their interactions?—the introduction of democratic politics, the rise of state bureaucracies, the shrinking size of the family, the transformation in numbers of people working away from their homes and/or among relative strangers, the growth of cities, the increased ease of travel, the conquest and loss of empires, the globalization of the economy, the change in living standards, the increase in capacity to kill in war, and so on. All of these unquestionably have played a role in the transformation of moral sources and the reconstitution of selfhood.

For the most part, these social factors are simply another dimension to Taylor's story, about which it would be nice to know more. Yet in some ways they bear on the internal workings of what he has done. Taylor notes rightly that "the modern identity arose because changes in the self-understandings connected with a wide variety of practices—religious, political, economic, familial, intellectual, artistic—converged and reinforced each other to produce it" (p. 206). If we want to take this seriously, however, we need to think more carefully. If identity is really embedded in practices, and if changes arose in connection with these practices, what does this mean for an argument conducted largely in terms of articulations and at some distance from concrete examination of practices? If a significant part of the dynamism in the history comes from problems confronted in other sorts of practices, how is this to be reconciled with the dynamism which the present book suggests (rightly, I think) comes from internal tensions within systems of ideas, and from tensions between them and their environments? The issue arises with regard both to the production of new ideas and to the demand for them.

One answer—an answer Taylor gives implicitly—is that he is writing an interpretation, not a historical explanation. This is fair enough, but 1) the interpretation is explicitly genetic, and 2) the impact of social practices and social change is not entirely peripheral to the interpretation. Let me be specific (if still schematic): Taylor inveighs against the objectifying, reifying methods of naturalist social science. He does not consider, however, that different topics of inquiry may suffer more or less violence from these methods. He also does not consider the aspects of modern social life that could not be grasped without those methods or something like them—for example, most of the workings of the large-scale market economy, or much of military and bureaucratic organization.

Habermas (1984, 1988) introduces the distinction between system and lifeworld partly to get at the difference between those realms in which a hermeneutic understanding will be adequate and those which also require statistical and/or systemic analyses. Unfortunately, most social scientists do not complement their objectifying studies with hermeneutic ones, or attempt critically to expose the reification involved in treating large-scale systems of human action as though they were natural systems rather than the products of individual activity. These scholars deserve Taylor's criticism, but he should consider what they study and why there is a demand for it. It is not only because of the long-standing attractions of naturalism, but also because a world has been built—during the very period covered by Taylor's study and with the help of naturalistic thinking—which includes administrative organizations, markets, and communications systems of a scale and kind dramatically different from those of Locke's day. The modern self must necessarily be understood in relation to these systems of large-scale organization, as in relation to democratic politics and capitalist economics.

I do not mean that any of these other factors simply *caused* changes in the self. I do mean that living in this transformed social world changes a host of practices in which, as Taylor observes, identity is embedded. The possibilities for anonymity that Simmel noted in cities, for example, are multiplied in some ways by new communications media. Strong judgments about self-responsible reason were tied to the constitution of a new form of political elite in Locke's day. In ours they have lost this role, both because of expansion of the franchise and because of debasement of political discourse. Even so, the punctual self remains a vital aspect of modern identity because it fits not only the assumptions of social scientists and the record-keeping functions of large-scale social systems, but also (and crucially) because it fits the experience of living in a world dominated by such systems. The disabling of theistic sources may be due not merely to the weakness of the argument from design but also to the omnipresence of these large-scale organizations, which fill the space of God without offering any moral source.

Not only do material social factors influence the construction of self and morality; so, too do our *conceptions* of social order. Taylor says relatively little about how our understandings of the larger social world impinge on our senses of who we can be. Our ideas of what existing social arrangements make possible also affect our moral judgments, and not merely as prudential constraints but also as part of their constitution. Not least of all, our ideas—and experience—of how and whether social organization can be changed affect both how we see our personal identities fitting into history and how we see our moral stances mattering in the world. Are we significant as moral creatures only in our narrow communities (and thereby both devalued and absolved from responsibility in the larger world)? Or do we see ourselves and our actions as mattering even in relations among people we will never meet?

Finally, Taylor's account of moral sources is surprisingly cognitive and discursive—perhaps because it is so overwhelmingly an account of a philosopher's articulations. Yet it seems to me that we could go further with his insight into inarticulate moral sources, linking them not only to individual identity but also to social relationships. Articulations tend, by their rhetorical nature, towards universal formulation. Taylor does note the personal significance of narratives, which are more particular, but might we not also note the power of our strongest social relations, of "significant others," in Mead's term? Our moral motivations, I think, derive in large part not from abstract reason about what is right in general, but from concrete, highly immediate, and even embodied sensitivity to how our actions fit into the relationships we most value. The

relationships themselves—parent/child, spouse, mentor, friend—become moral sources, not as ideas of the good but as orienting, constitutive goods. These primary relationships are especially important, I think, as sources of the capacity to affirm life, to see the good, which Taylor regards as morally central and currently endangered.<sup>28</sup>

These are minor objections at most, and really openings for further work. A revitalized and reoriented sociology could contribute a great deal to this interdisciplinary pursuit of a strong theory of the self, of morality, and of social orders. Taylor's work is *the* starting point for those who would take on the task, but I hope readership will not be limited to those brave ones. Taylor's work would enrich enormously the scholarship of any sociologist. *Sources of the Self* speaks directly to some of our disciplinary incapacities, so I hope the readers will be many.

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<sup>28</sup> Neither should we leave out the moral significance of secondary relationships and institutions that shape and place demands not only on our behavior but on our emotions as well (Hochschild 1986).

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