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CHARLES TAYLOR
AS A
CHRISTIAN THINKER

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Test everything. Hold onto the good.

—— St. Paul

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a critical examination of Charles Taylor's moral theory. Its purpose is to understand both Taylor himself as an important contemporary Christian thinker, as well as the ramifications his philosophy has in the realm of Christian Ethics and Practical Theology.

Part I (chapters 1-3) discusses the development of Taylor's moral theory, particularly as it appears in *Sources of the Self*. Chapter One begins by discussing Taylor's definition of ethics which includes notions of the good and the meaningful in our lives. This leads to his argument that the moral domain depends upon frameworks of significance closely linked to the identity of the moral agent. Chapter Two examines Taylor's idea of moral frameworks in terms of practical reasoning and moral articulation. Finally, Chapter Three develops Taylor's arguments for articulating the goods in our lives, and why this is essential for the pursuit of ethics.

Part II (chapters 4-5) investigates certain theological influences on Taylor. Chapter Four is a discussion of Taylor and Augustine which draws certain parallels and contrasts in the field of theological anthropology. Chapter Five examines how Taylor's idea of the Church in modernity has largely been shaped by Yves Congar's writings on the laity and Henry de Lubac's *Catholicism*. It examines Taylor's ecclesiology with specific reference to these two theologians who have had a significant impact on his Christian identity.

Part III (Chapters 6-8) looks more specifically at Taylor's relevancy to Christian Ethics and Practical Theology. By way of introduction, Chapter Six argues for a distinct role for God in Taylor's theory. Following on from this I discuss through a brief historical argument how secular philosophy has eclipsed two important features of Christian Ethics which Taylor asserts are indispensable for giving the best account of the human moral domain. These two features are

transcendence and *ontology*, and Chapter Seven examines these particularly in relation to the role they have in Taylor's philosophy, and what implications this has for Christian Ethics. The final chapter develops the discussion of transcendence and ontology through the essential good of *Agape*. *Agape* is discussed not only as a pivotal concept in Christian Ethics, but also as a fundamental part of Taylor's own moral framework. I conclude this chapter by arguing that Taylor's ontologically 'thick' concept of *Agape* as an empowering good needs to be considered in Christian Ethics if we are to be consistent about the transcendent and ontological claims of the discipline.

In conclusion I bring together some of the seminal features of Taylor's philosophy as articulated in the thesis. In particular these are discussed in the light of their valuable contribution to our understanding of Christian Ethics and Practical Theology.

Except where indicated, this thesis represents my original work.

D. Michael Heath

To my parents

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This investigation has been a rich and rewarding experience for me. In many ways it is just the first step in what I hope will be a continuing project in Theology. There are many applications of Taylor's philosophy barely touched upon in this thesis which I hope to pursue in the future. His 'politics of recognition' has immense potential in ecumenical studies both in regards to the differences within the Church as well as the more global perspective of inter-faith dialogue. Some of his ideas of modern art and divine revelation I find extremely helpful, and I think they can be fruitfully applied to the discipline of Theological Aesthetics. One of the most straightforward applications of his moral theory that I can see is in the realm of pastoral counselling. Understanding moral reasoning as articulating the goods in our lives can open up new roles for the counsellor as moral interlocutor.

Charles Taylor has had a profound effect on my own world view, and I am grateful to Michael Northcott who first introduced me to *Sources of the Self*. I would also like to express my deepest appreciation for Duncan Forrester, not only for suggesting that I investigate Taylor as a Christian thinker, but for the continuing support and insight he has offered throughout my time at New College. I have also gained much from the small collection of post-graduates in the 'whither theology' circle. It has been an invaluable forum for articulating how Taylor's philosophy can be applied to theological issues, and I particularly appreciate the leadership of Kevin Van Hoozer and Fergus Kerr.

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INTRODUCTION

Charles Taylor is unique in constructing a comprehensive philosophical system in an age that he himself recognises as heavily pluralistic. His philosophy engages with the pluralism of modernity, but not in simplistic terms. That is, he does not come down completely on the side of either the ‘knockers’ or the ‘boosters’ of the Enlightenment. As such it is difficult to speak about Taylor’s philosophical commitments in a language of generalisations. Many consider him to be a ‘realist’ even though he would not necessarily hold to a strict correspondence theory of truth. He is often labelled a Communitarian, even though he wants to affirm the importance of the individual in society.

What drives this unwillingness to be catalogued in any comprehensive way is the intellectual integrity of one who will challenge the dogmas of an age if they do not fit with the truth as he sees it. Isaiah Berlin has recognised this aspect of Taylor as both a personal friend and an intellectually gifted colleague:

‘He is a man of acute intelligence, total intellectual and moral sincerity, unswerving integrity, and a remarkable insight into a variety of philosophical traditions, their central animating ideas, uncluttered by ingenious and sometimes highly complicated means of defence against actual or possible objections. His view of social and political life, to which he has devoted his thought, is imaginative, generously receptive, deeply humane and formed by the truth as he sees it, and not as it ought to be in accordance with dogmatically held premises or overmastering ideology. This gives to his work an authenticity, a concreteness, and a sense of reality which some of his less open-minded, proselytising, not to say formula—and ideology—ridden allies and disciples do not always show.’¹

¹See *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The philosophy of Charles Taylor in question*, ed. James Tully (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p.1.

Some of these allies that Berlin speaks of are certainly theologians and Christian ethicists. Taylor as a Roman Catholic has had much to say to the post-modern predicament in theology, albeit indirectly. He has also, however, been criticised by a number of theologians for his 'open-mindedness' in as much as this is interpreted as a lack of commitment to the traditional doctrines of Christianity. Some have accused him of not coming out strongly enough against relativism or certain Enlightenment values which they see as incompatible with any Christian position.²

Ironically enough there is a larger group of thinkers who do not sympathise with Taylor's Christian viewpoint and continually criticise his philosophy for working on the assumption of God's existence. Taylor in effect is caught on the fence between those who feel he is not being explicit enough from the outset about his Christian commitment, and those who want to disqualify his philosophical system because it arrives finally at a belief in God.

Taylor himself has something similar to say to each party. His work in the political and social realm is based on his understanding of truth and how that is expressed in society. His arguments, therefore, are grounded in how he sees things to be, not on an assumed deity. While he admits that his faith may cause him to ask questions that secular theorists would avoid, this does not disqualify the answers. At the same time, Taylor recognises that philosophy cannot begin with God in the way theology does, and so he is clear about his task being one distinct from the theologian's. In effect he is doing the work of natural theology rather than systematics.

This of course has the advantage of speaking a language directly relevant to the conditions of the modern world in a way that theology is often criticised for not being able to do. Taylor's comprehensive philosophical system is ensconced in the undeniable varieties of existence and as such has much to say to secular society about the truth-claims of Christianity. His arguments against certain predominant views of the human agent serve as an evangelistic programme compelling the modern to think again.

²See for example Stanley Hauerwas and David Matzko, 'The Sources of Charles Taylor', *Religious Studies Review*, 18, 1992, pp.286-289.

Approaching his moral theory with the understanding that it is a formulation which speaks to the central issues of our time means that it can have a considerable impact on the shape of Christian ethics. As an argument against certain features of secularism, it can act as a moral map steering us clear of often unseen dangers. As a position which does not condemn modernity in blanket terms, however, it can serve as a foundation for dialogue, and has much to teach us in terms of our assumed moral positions in Christian ethics.

In this way, while Taylor's philosophical theory is undergirded with a sophisticated and abstract metaphysics and epistemology, it nevertheless is directly relevant to 'applied ethics'. He himself ensures this in his own philosophical formulations, and has often been praised for taking the inaccessibility of philosophical inquiry and bringing it down to the level of application in the day to day world. Jürgen Habermas remarks that Taylor is unique as a philosopher in this way:

'Legal experts have the advantage of discussing normative questions in connection with cases to be decided. Their thinking is oriented to application. Philosophers avoid this decisionist pressure; as contemporaries of classical ideas extending over more than two thousand years, they are not embarrassed to consider themselves participants in a conversation that will go on forever. Hence it is all the more fascinating when someone like Charles Taylor attempts to grasp his own times in ideas and to show the relevance of philosophical insights to the pressing political questions of the day.'³

Habermas goes on to say that Taylor's work is brilliant and inspiring, '...although, or rather because, he does not follow the fashionable path of an "applied ethics".'⁴ In not following this path, Taylor bridges a gap between theory and praxis. His metaphysical inquiries naturally lead to actual applications in the social and the political life. Describing Taylor's methodology in these overly-linear terms, however, is misleading. For it is not that theory leads to the *goal* of praxis, but rather that the two are intricately interdependent.

The stark bifurcation of theory and praxis which is prevalent in theology can gain a great deal from the way Taylor brings these two together under the heading of

³See Jürgen Habermas, 'The Struggle for Recognition' in *Multiculturalism: examining the politics of recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) p.135.

⁴*Ibid.*, p.135.

moral articulation.⁵ In the realm of systematics this prevents the theologian from becoming an obsolete and irrelevant theoretician by joining theological questions concerning the nature of God with our understanding of how this affects our existence. More specifically relevant to this thesis is the way this understanding of theory and praxis relates to Christian ethics. The realm of 'practical know-how and ministerial skills' has been severed from the theology of 'contemplation' and is studied in isolation.⁶

Taylor's methodology, however, can help us to understand how important it is to anchor a practical formulation within a theoretical framework which both explains the formulation and helps to encourage it. This must be understood as a mutual compatibility between theory and praxis rather than one upholding the other. As Peter Hodgson indicates, the purpose of bringing together theory and praxis is not 'deducing one thing from another (as though one thing were foundational and another derivative), but of showing that truth occurs in terms of mutually interdependent relations.'⁷

Furthermore, there is a specific application of Taylor's methodology to Christian ethics in the way he understands the good and articulating the good in our lives. This is not merely equated with discovering the theological import and motivation of our ethical policies, though it includes this important dimension. The way that the good functions in Taylor's moral ontology can help us realise that Christian ethics extends beyond the boundaries of good acts to the very meaning of our lives, and as such cannot be segregated from any theoretical articulations. This may make those who are insistent upon some cut and dried schema of ethical formalisation very uneasy, for they may see Taylor's lack of dogmatism as a lack of any significant focus. This thesis prepares to argue against such a position. Taylor as a Christian thinker can be seen as a 'great fertilising force'. His rich moral ontology and

⁵For a discussion of this split see Peter Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994).

⁶Interestingly enough, the split is reminiscent of the dichotomy of Aristotle's good life: *phronesis* (praxis) and *theoria* (theory). For the development of these two disciplines in theology see Edward Farely, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

⁷See Peter Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit*, p.16.

his own personal Christian vision gives new insight to the very methodological bedrock of Christian ethics and Practical Theology.

PART I



Taylor's Moral Ontology

CHAPTER ONE



Moral Frameworks and Personal Identity

Sources of the Self is at one and the same time the most thorough and succinct articulation of Charles Taylor's moral theory.¹ This volume not only offers an extraordinary breadth of philosophical engagement, but also brings together many of the seminal investigations of Taylor's earlier philosophy. Through this one can detect his earlier work in metaphysics, political theory, and philosophical anthropology surfacing within an ethical framework.² This monograph, therefore, will be the primary text in this thesis. I will begin by drawing out the main components of his definition of morality. Building upon this definition Taylor constructs a moral realism which makes claims against most of the moral philosophies espoused in contemporary thought. He argues that there is a need to work within necessary moral frameworks, but he also explains how it is that the modern individual comes to

¹Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

²For Taylor's work in metaphysics see his book *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), and more recently his collections of essays *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). For his work in political theory see *Patterns of Politics* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), *Hegel and modern society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), *Multiculturalism: examining the politics of recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), and *Rapprocher les solitudes: écrits sur le fédéralisme et le nationalisme au Canada*, ed. Guy Laforest (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1992). The majority of his work in philosophical anthropology can be found in the two volume collection of essays *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers, Volume One* and *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers, Volume Two* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). A comprehensive bibliography of Taylor's writings can be found in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, pp.258-264.

ignore these frameworks. In this explanation Taylor identifies several coherent reasons for this denial. By critiquing the objections from various modern theories that would contest Taylor's moral realism, the first part of this examination traces Taylor's formulations through a dialectical process. This eventually brings to the surface what lies behind our moral intuitions in modern society. It will then be clear how Taylor's moral theory evolves and whether it can stand against the tide of modern philosophical scepticism.

A Moral Definition

The first problem that Taylor addresses in *Sources of the Self* is the modern limits to the term 'moral'. Modern moral theory has focused on what it is right to do, what one's obligations are to oneself and society. The questions of philosophy are thereby limited to terms of *action*. In this narrow definition we talk about whether it is right to sacrifice the good of the one for the many, or what our obligations are concerning the government, a community, or other individuals. This kind of morality investigates how one should act in certain situations, and what decisions one should make based on the ramifications of certain consequences. While Taylor does not want to argue that this kind of moral calculating is insignificant, he does cogently point out that treating this as comprehensive means that certain aspects of our lives which affect us, and which really matter to us, do not come into play in the moral realm. This way of addressing the moral, for example, does not see questions in terms of what it is good to *be*. It does not speak to the issues involved in formulating the nature of the good life, yet this is essentially a moral matter. The primary reason that 'narrow' moral theories ignore these kinds of questions is that they have no room for any notion of the good as an object of love, or as what Iris Murdoch calls a 'privileged focus of attention or will'.³ Taylor argues that in so doing they represent a skewed perception of morality, one which needs to be adjusted.

³Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge, 1970), see also her more recent work *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Penguin, 1992).

There are several reasons why our concept of morality needs to be broadened, and all of these have to do with the way we react in various situations. In order to justify the inclusion of these other spheres of the moral we must investigate our moral intuitions and reactions and come to understand what lies behind these 'feelings'. If one wants to include in a definition of the moral not only notions of justice, equality, etc., but broader concepts involving what underlies worth and value for the human agent, his dignity, or a fulfilling and meaningful life, one must show that the questions involved in these latter issues are of the same type as the former.

The problem then involves whether there is a difference of kind between something we could easily recognise as a moral dilemma, such as whether or not one should condone capital punishment, and those more extensive issues such as life goals, feelings of worth, concepts of benevolence and universal dignity. Taylor points out that there is a common factor which underlies the reason why both kinds of questions should be labelled 'spiritual' terms since both involve what he identifies as 'strong evaluations'.⁴

In other words the more general kind of moral issues are similar to those focusing on action terms in that they too involve discriminating between right and wrong, higher and lower, good and bad. Unlike what Taylor calls 'weak evaluations' these judgements are not rendered acceptable based merely on our inclinations or feelings. In fact they can often go against what we 'desire' to do. So for example, I may want to seek revenge on someone even though I *know* it is not right. Likewise, I may have a desire to live a reclusive life because it is a peaceful and less complicated existence, yet I understand that interaction with others is more in tune with the kinds of values that I consider make life worth living.

Strong evaluations of this kind involve qualitative distinctions. In a qualitative distinction one's desires are classified 'in such categories as higher and lower, virtuous and vicious, more and less fulfilling, and more and less refined, profound and superficial, noble and base. They are judged as belonging to qualitatively different modes of life: fragmented or integrated, alienated or free,

⁴Charles Taylor, 'What is Human Agency?', in *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

saintly, or merely human, courageous or pusillanimous'⁵ Where weak evaluations are concerned primarily with the results, strong ones are concerned with the 'qualitative *worth* of different desires.'

A good example Taylor gives of a weak evaluation is deciding between a holiday in the north or the south. There is a choice between the rugged beauty of the north, the pleasure of the landscape untainted by human civilisation, and the warmth of the south, the feeling of well-being, the joy of swimming in the ocean. One holiday is more 'exhilarating' the other more 'relaxing'. Taylor describes the choice here as a weak evaluation because there are different characteristics of each holiday which make them desirable, but there is no distinguishing between the desires in any sense of worthiness. 'I ultimately opt for the south over the north not because there is something more worthy about relaxing than being exhilarated, but just because "I feel like it".'⁶ The language which can eventually explain this choice is inarticulate. A strong evaluation, however, is precisely capable of expression. 'The strong evaluator can articulate superiority just because he has a language of contrastive characterisation.'⁷

In a strong evaluation a choice is necessarily contrasted, it is not a contingent choice depending upon the circumstances of the moment. Being a certain kind of person which includes choosing dignity over baseness does not depend upon circumstances. It is never the case that baseness and dignity may at times be compatible in the same way that one may holiday both in the north and the south if one were to split the holiday between both places. 'For in strong evaluations, where we deploy a language of evaluative distinctions, the rejected desire is not so rejected because of some mere contingent or circumstantial conflict with another goal. Being cowardly does not compete with other goals by taking up the time or energy I need to pursue them, and it may not alter my circumstances in such a way as to prevent my pursuing them.'⁸

⁵Ibid., p.16.

⁶Ibid., p.17.

⁷Ibid., p.24.

⁸Ibid., p.21.

Furthermore, the strong evaluator chooses the virtue based on the kind of quality of life which it expresses and sustains. 'I eschew the cowardly act ... because I want to be a courageous and honourable human being.'⁹ A good way of determining whether an evaluation is a 'strong' one by Taylor's definition is whether it can be the basis for attitudes of respect and admiration. Thus we might call someone 'courageous' if their act of rushing the enemy in battle aligns itself with a particular concept that we admire. This would not be an object of respect, however, if one were doing this same deed because one had a sense that living was no longer worthwhile and danger was not an issue.

Virtues such as prudence and wisdom seem to play an important role in refereeing between our strong moral evaluations and our instinctual feelings. On the other hand our feelings often may uncover some 'hidden' moral agenda which we would not necessarily articulate and which we would even want to deny. A conceptual comparison may prove to make this point more clearly.

There is an incident in Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* where a servant named Roxana has been accused of stealing money from her employer. On this occasion, however, she is not guilty as she had 'been saved in the nick of time by a revival ... a fortnight before,' where she 'got religion'. On seeing the money her boss had left unprotected on his desk, she grows resentful towards this new morality which is impinging on her opportunity of acquiring dishonest wealth. She curses her conversion saying, 'Dad blame that revival, I wish'd it had 'a' be'n put off 'til tomorrow.' Twain then goes on to explain that this sudden spurt of honesty was due to religious etiquette, something by no means 'to be wrestled with into a precedent.'¹⁰

Roxana thinks that morality is something with which one can choose to involve oneself depending on what one desires. At the time of seeing the money she wanted the pleasure of the pious feelings, but she also wanted the money and therefore wished to be freed from the former desire. In expressing this wish that her conversion could have been 'put off 'til tomorrow', Roxana seems to assume that one can only apply moral judgements to one's own or others' actions if one is *willing* to

⁹Ibid., p.25.

¹⁰I owe this example to R. W. Beardsmore, *Art and Morality* (London: Macmillan, 1971).

take part in moral reasoning. If this were true, then someone may reasonably wish that he no longer feel remorse so that he might enjoy the full pleasures of wrongdoing.

Kierkegaard, however, makes a significant claim when he describes remorse as 'so wonderful a power ... so sincere is its friendship, that to escape it entirely is the most terrible thing of all.'¹¹ He is making a conceptual point about morality with this statement. In effect he is saying that if one has a concern for the good, if one cares about doing what is right, then one cannot at the same time wish to be freed from this concern. This is what Taylor describes as a *strong evaluation*. Roxana's wish that she be free from a concern for the good simply indicates that she *has* no such concern. A real concern would lead her to condemn such a wish, but her feelings in this situation have uncovered a hidden agenda which shows no concern for a strong evaluation of honesty.

In this way morality is quite unlike any other form of activity. There is no contradiction, for example, in wishing to be freed from one's preoccupation with art or in saying that art has no value for you. If someone were to say, however, that one no longer wants to be concerned with morality, we can still make the moral judgement that he *ought* to be concerned with it. It should be noted here that the man who claims not to care about art may meet with a similar objection, 'Well, you ought to care.' This possibility proves rather than disproves that such pronouncements about an individual's willingness to engage in certain activities, or to hold to certain general formulations of what is worthwhile, are within the moral. The paradox here can be alleviated by recognising that the judgement in question is a judgement made from within morality, a judgement made about the moral significance of art. It has as a fundamental feature a strong evaluation concerning what ought to be worthwhile. The 'ought' used is not the kind of *hypothetical* obligation one would use, for example, in the sentence, 'If you want to learn how to croon like Frank Sinatra, you *ought* to take singing lessons.' It is rather the *compelling* ought which suggests a moral agenda. To say one ought to care about art is to make a moral statement about the value of art in one's life. There are various terms which can be substituted in the

¹¹Søren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart*, trans. Douglas Steere (New York: Fontana Books, 1966) p.35.

place of art here and this, of course, leads quite clearly to Taylor's wider definition of the moral. Questions concerning the value of X in one's life are questions with a moral agenda. They are compelling in that they involve a strong evaluation. One can argue for one *over* another in a way that is different from speaking about taste or certain inconsequential preferences—Granny Smith apples are better than Golden Delicious. This is the point that Swift makes in *Gulliver's Travels* about the absurdity of the Lilliputian's war with the 'big-enders'. Choosing between breaking open a hard-boiled egg from the big end or the little end is morally inconsequential. It is utterly inane to consider fighting a war over such an issue.

With this key common denominator unveiled many of the similarities between what we take to be our moral obligations and what we look for as important in our life also come to the surface. The moral reactions we have in both cases deal with the questions in a similar way and it is primarily for this reason that we should broaden our moral horizon.

Taylor observes that one of the most powerful clusters of strong evaluations in modern society involves our respect for others. This, however, is so deeply ingrained as a moral reaction that it seems instinctual. Contrasted with this are other moral reactions such as the condemnation of drug abuse or obedience to authority which have been instilled upon us through education or cultural conditioning. In the past this respect for others has been articulated in various cultures in specific ways which lend an explanation to the intuitional simulation. So, for example, in the Judeo-Christian realm we come to understand respect for humans as God's creatures, made in his image. As Kant understood respect, its uniqueness depended on humans being rational agents worthy of dignity.¹² These various reasons tell us what human beings are and *therefore* we should respect them.

Like all moral reactions of this kind there are two distinct facets involved. First, our respect for humans seems to be instinctual, intuitive, strongly based on feelings we have, comparable to others such as those of fear, love, happiness, or even nausea. Secondly, these moral reactions seem to involve claims about the human

¹²See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, trans. T. K. Abbott (London: Longmans, 1973; 6th ed., 1909).

person. In the example above we are given two *reasons* why we should respect others, viz. as creatures made in God's image or as rational beings. These are both based on the nature of the human individual. This second strand is an important affirmation of a given ontology of the human, and it is something which most modern philosophers do not hold to.

Simple Naturalism: The Subjectivists

In this distinction between the two facets of a moral reaction Taylor comes up against his first opponent to his moral realism, or posited moral ontology. The moral subjectivist would want to argue that there is nothing behind our moral reactions, that they are merely intuitions and nothing else. The motivation behind such assertions are many and complex. They form an important feature of Taylor's argument against what he calls 'naturalist' theories.¹³ For the moment, however, it will suffice to point out that many of the subjectivist theories assume some socio-biological explanation concerning moral reactions, so that they are explained in terms of evolutionary utility and the modern scientific concept of *function*.¹⁴

The subjectivist, rather than seeing our moral positions as grounded in reason or the nature of things, sees them ultimately as adopted just because we are drawn to them. They are based on feelings or Humean sentiments. Nothing of substance lies behind them to offer us any further explanation of their nature. Any talk concerning some sort of ontology which gives rational articulation to these reactions is nothing but metaphysical froth. According to the subjectivist we are to treat these moral intuitions like any other feeling. They are on a par with melancholia or warm contentment.

¹³Taylor uses this word, not to connote the view that man can be seen as part of nature, but that the nature of which humans are a part is to be understood according to the canons which emerged in the 17th century revolution in the *natural sciences*. In other words the understanding of human life and actions is to be modelled on the natural sciences. So, for example, one should avoid anthropocentric or what Taylor calls 'subjective' properties and explain the behaviour of the human agent in 'absolute' terms (*Human Agency and Language*, pp.2ff. and 45-76).

¹⁴For more on this concept, which differs greatly from Aristotle's idea of *ergon*, see Larry Wright, 'Function', *Philosophical Review*, 82, 1973, pp.139-168.

The first argument Taylor has against this view investigates whether we really do equate these moral reactions with feelings. Are there any features of our moral reactions which mark them as distinct? As an example of how we are to distinguish or segregate the moral intuitions we have, Taylor examines the idea of nausea. It has already been noted that unlike feelings, moral intuitions involve strong evaluations. We could not say that feeling nauseous about something demanded our respect or admiration in the way a certain moral inclination would. The distinction, however, can be taken much further than this.

Both moral feelings and sentiments like nausea are due to responding to certain properties in an object. In the case of the former, however, the properties mark the object as one *meriting* this response. We can argue that this object *should* have these properties above and beyond other objects. In other words we can defend and argue for certain moral responses in a way that would seem absurd if they were mere feelings. We can insist on someone being consistent in their moral reactions where we cannot with feelings such as nausea. Even philosophers who do not hold to a moral ontology often critique our moral reactions according to such a consistency.

Furthermore, moral reactions are goals and purposes such that, were we to lose them, we would feel diminished. Looking at this from another angle, one can say about such reactions that 'If I were different in this regard, I would be a much better person.' We could not say the same about a simple preference for chocolate over strawberry ice-cream. This is not a moral point, and there is no strong evaluation involved.

One interpretation of Plato's *Republic* is to see it as Plato arguing to get strong evaluations back into the debate about the nature of things. Thrasymachus represents the younger highly educated Athenian who is challenging the traditional assumptions of his predecessors by arguing that obeying the law does not involve qualitative distinctions. It is just de facto that one conforms to power.¹⁵ Plato argues against this relativist position by saying that it is because of our ontology that we obey the law and seek justice, not because we simply feel like doing it. It is not just a matter of happenstance. We as rational beings seek the good, which means we seek

¹⁵See *Republic*, trans. Francis Cornford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941) Bk.I.

to grasp the nature of things. In this pursuit strong evaluations are inescapable and distinct.¹⁶

Taylor does point out that there could be a case for seeing a sentiment such as nausea as advantageous in some instances and not others, and through training one might be able to condition oneself, for survival etc., to feel nausea in certain instances, and to avoid it in others. But one could not then articulate what the nauseating would be in terms of properties and then use this to invalidate some response of nausea that you or anyone else had. It seems laughable to suggest that we could have invalid objects of nausea in this way.¹⁷ Conversely, it does seem cogent to argue for certain objects commanding our respect by virtue of what they are and what they represent. Such a moral reaction can be reinforced through various reasons, or alternatively a reaction like this can be criticised.

To attempt to assimilate the response involving strong evaluations with sentiments such as nausea is in effect to admit that our talk of fit objects of moral response is illusory. J. L. Mackie argues this point in his 'error-theory', which insists that there is no real discrimination between actual properties with criteria independent of our responses when we have moral reactions.¹⁸ Of course, this assertion can be applied to a socio-biological explanation of these reactions so that we find some reactions having a higher survival value than others, but it still does not explain the view that certain things and not others, simply by virtue of their nature, are fit objects of respect. In other words, Mackie's error-theory has a hard time dealing with the special status of morality as an activity we cannot simply choose to disengage from. It does not explain the difference between not *feeling* like contributing to Oxfam and not *feeling* like strawberry ice-cream.

As Taylor points out, this socio-biological explanation is completely disparate from the way we live our lives. We do not feel that it is right to respect certain things merely because it is useful to do so. We do not decide that based on the predicament of the human race at this particular point in history, we should be universally benevolent, in order to survive. It is truer to say that we have these 'gut' feelings

¹⁶I owe this example to Charles Taylor.

¹⁷See *Sources of the Self*, pp.6f.

because we think it would be wrong not to have them. This is the difference which distinguishes the compelling *ought* from the hypothetical.

Another important way of looking at the moral subjectivist can be found in Taylor's later work *The Ethics of Authenticity*.¹⁹ By attacking the neglect of reason in such a thesis he makes the simple point that if our moral reactions were really merely feelings, not only could we make no sense of them, but they would then thereby have no power to move us. In a subjectivist moral theory things have value because people deem them to have it, not because of any property that the object may have in and of itself. But this way of thinking about moral intuition is incoherent. For it assumes that value can be placed on anything willy-nilly, regardless of its nature. It claims that we can consider things to be of significance by mere fiat, even perhaps unwittingly. The world of moral reaction, however, does not work in this way. I cannot simply *decide* that the most important action in my life is going to be jumping out of an aeroplane with a parachute on. This does not make any sense for anyone, there must be a stronger explanation. Perhaps I am overcoming a crippling phobia, or my fiancée and I are in a parachute club together, and we are getting married on the way down. Either way there is some *reason* which lies behind my feelings. Sentiments in this way can never be all there is to moral intuitions, and feelings can never *determine* what is significant. Only when these feelings are reinforced by significant reasons *qua* values do they make any sense both to us and to others. Moral reactions are constantly pointing us to these further explanations, something which makes sense of the reactions. In other words there must be something of value existing beyond the personal immanent 'me' of the Rousseauian inner voice and sentiment, for me to find anything of worth.²⁰

¹⁸See J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).

¹⁹This is essentially a more succinct articulation of the ongoing argument in *Sources of the Self*.

²⁰See *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) pp.35ff.

Moral Frameworks

Ontological accounts, i.e., those based on the nature of human agents, have the status of articulating these moral reactions. If we leave them out, we ignore a vital ingredient of our moral dimension. There are several difficulties in this articulating process, however. The specific agent experiencing the moral reactions may not be the best authority to identify his or her moral background, at least not initially. One reason for this is that the ontology behind a person's views can remain largely implicit unless it is challenged. Furthermore, exploration of the background may be resisted for one reason or another. In this way there may be an inconsistency between what people admit to believing and what they, on the other hand, need in order to make sense of their moral reactions. For example, someone may not wish to admit to a racial prejudice, indeed may even deny such a belief, even though his moral reactions, if properly articulated, would suggest otherwise. Taylor is constantly exposing these cases in his argument against the naturalists where there is a lack of fit between the reaction and the background (or a denial of such background).²¹

A third reason why this moral ontology may be difficult to articulate has to do with the tentative nature of the experience. Particularly in the modern predicament we feel an uncertainty about many of our moral beliefs. There is a sense in which we are still groping to discover them. We may want to affirm our belief in such a background concerning our moral intuition, but are uncertain as to what this really is. Even in the realm of Christian ethics, which has traditionally held up a specific background against which we explain our values, there is still this uncertainty.

This third reason relates specifically to Christian ethics in a way the others do not. For Christian ethics is not necessarily a formulation of what people already implicitly believe, nor is it simply a matter of bringing to the surface what some

²¹It is a unique feature of Taylor's methodology that he does not merely dismiss those who are opposing his philosophy. Rather he argues that their views, if properly understood, would lead either to some internal conflict or to a position that is very similar to his own. He demonstrates a tremendous confidence in the power of truth in our shared experiences: 'Experiences are shared so if we bring them out we can ideally convince them [those opposing us] that there is something missing. There I agree with Plato, we all have this tendency in us and it's a matter of finding the forms it takes Any situation has built into it a negation so you can get inside it and say, "well what's this doing here?"' (Appendix C).

would want to deny, yet must admit to in practice. Rather, it seeks to show that a certain ontology is in fact the only adequate basis for our moral responses, whether we can recognise this or not. In the case of Christianity we are dealing with the ontology of the Gospel in various manifestations. In doing so we insist upon this specific background against which we can make sense of our moral reactions.

Taylor identifies two important features of our modern, universal, moral concept which are linked to the notion of respect discussed above. The first observation is that there seems to be a universal consensus in modern society to avoid suffering.²² This is an intricate part of what we consider respect to be today (*pace* Nietzsche). Certain features of our legal code can give us an indication of how this is instilled into the framework of our lives. For example, legal executions are no longer 'public' as they were for centuries. They are kept quietly contained within the walls of the prison. Many of the forms of execution have also been done away with on grounds of unnecessary suffering or inhumane treatment of the condemned.²³

This stress on human welfare has as one of its sources certain religious ideologies. It springs particularly from the New Testament focus of the early Church in living out Christ's Gospel. In a secular guise utilitarianism has taken up some of this content in modern society. Taylor sees many of the features of this universal beneficence falling under the rubric of what he calls the 'affirmation of everyday life'. This refers to the life goods of production and the family which became more and more emphasised in society after the Reformation.²⁴

Contrary to some interpretations of the Aristotelian system of ethics, there grew up in Christendom, and particularly post-Reformation modernity, the idea that 'the good life' was not to be described exclusively in terms of the life of contemplation (*theoria*) and one's activity as a citizen (*phronesis*). Rather, the

²²See *Sources of the Self*, pp.12f.

²³What is interesting to note, however, is that although most states in the United States have eradicated capital punishment, there is a strong movement from the conservative right to reinstate this form of 'justice'. In many respects this can be interpreted as a shift back to an older order of the cosmos whereby the convicted are punished in order to redress the balance that has been thrown off with their crime. Society is seen as ritually undoing the terrible crime with an equally terrible punishment. In such an ethos the victims of murder see the execution of the murderer as 'justice being done'. Michel Foucault has analysed this in *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).

²⁴See *Sources of the Self*, Pt.III.

ordinary became the centre of a good life, and how life was lived out in the day to day was of utmost importance. The life of the God-fearing individual was substantiated in marriage, raising a family, and an ethic of hard work. God was to be found in the everyday and these qualities of the ordinary became a kind of calling. The 'higher' forms of the good were in a sense dethroned. Taylor believes that this affirmation of the ordinary life has become one of the most powerful ideas in modern civilisation, and while he wishes to embrace this ethical vantage point, he does not concur with many of the misconceived ramifications it has instilled.

The discussion above has dealt with only one strand of moral intuitions, those beliefs which cluster around our sense that human life ought to be respected. Taylor argues that if one leaves morality at this point, there are still many features in our lives which remain outside the moral, particularly those which are concerned with how one is to live a life to make it fulfilling. What is it that constitutes a rich and meaningful existence? Because this question deals with strong evaluations it must also be addressed within the moral sphere. There is a sense in which 'to understand our moral world we have to see not only what ideas and pictures underlie our sense of respect for others but also those which underpin our notions of a full life.'²⁵

For Taylor, concepts of the full life should not be separated from those addressing issues of respect. On the contrary, he wishes to argue for a complex relation between the two, particularly in the realm of the affirmation of everyday life. A third axis which he links to these ideas is the need to feel respected by others. This is not 'respect' in the sense of the word used above, as in having respect for someone's rights, but rather thinking well of someone. He calls this 'attitudinal' respect and it concerns certain concepts of dignity. 'Dignity', as Taylor uses the term, is the sense of ourselves as commanding attitudinal respect, the idea that we are thought well of by others. From the very beginning, the way we move, gesture, and speak is shaped by the fact that we are aware of other people and what they think of us. 'Our style of movement expresses how we see ourselves as enjoying respect or lacking it, as commanding it or failing to do so.'²⁶ There is a natural desire not only

²⁵*Sources of the Self*, p.14.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p.15.

to be liked by others, but to be liked for the right reasons. So we hear people say, 'If only I were more attractive, or quick-witted or funny ... then people would like me.' Of course some of these reasons for not being liked one could argue against as not being suitable frameworks within the realm of dignity on which to base our moral reactions. They may seem counter-intuitive to what we value (being 'liked' by others because I am feared), or they may simply be shallow (being liked because I have blond hair or a fast car).

From the articulation of these three axes Taylor develops the notion of moral 'frameworks' or 'horizons'. This is precisely the set of questions within these axes that we as human agents exist amidst and against which we can make sense of our life. It is a horizon of meaning by which we see ourselves defined, a set of values which instil meaning to our lives quite independently of our own desires, inclinations, or choices.

Certain frameworks may already be existing in our lives through tradition or social norms. For example, growing up in a Christian home should give me a certain framework which includes the Bible and its tradition as a value in my life. There may be certain frameworks which one holds against one's compatriots. Jesus Christ is an example of someone who lived within such a framework. The values within his own life conflicted with those of the established hierarchy of his society.

In so far as we depend upon these frameworks for meaning in our lives they help to define our identity. For our identity is inextricably linked to what is significant in our lives. Who we are, and where we are coming from is 'the background against which our tastes and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense.'²⁷ Taylor does not think this is merely a contingent fact about the psychological make-up of the human agent. Rather he claims 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 recognise as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood.'²⁸

²⁷*The Ethics of Authenticity*, p.34.

²⁸*Sources of the Self*, p.27.

When Taylor speaks of identity he is referring to those things that are of crucial importance to us:

‘To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand.’²⁹

As suggested above, identifying these frameworks, i.e., this moral ontology which lies behind our reactions, is often difficult. It is something that Alasdair MacIntyre describes as a moral ‘quest’.³⁰ One can hope that these quests will lead to moral legitimacy and comfort, that articulating these ontologies will reconfirm our moral reactions. We may, for example, feel that it was wrong for the government to tax the domestic fuel of pensioners, and in articulating the moral framework within which this reaction occurs, we come to find certain beliefs concerning equality and justice to be confirmed and even strengthened.

In as much as these articulations can be considered a quest, however, one can see the possibility of failure. Consequently, if the quest is one for meaning, then failing would lead to a sense of meaninglessness. In such a situation we would not be able to make sense of our lives. We would be ‘spiritually senseless.’ In this respect the term ‘quest’ implies a great deal about our moral frameworks and their formulation.

The dynamics of moral formulations are extremely important in Taylor’s theory for reasons which become clear if we understand the way that language and meaning interact in our lives. Meaning here has two definitions. First it refers to coherency, that of which we can make sense. Secondly, it refers to purpose and value, that which is worth doing or acting upon. The problems concerning the meaning of life are addressed when one *creates* meaning in the sense of coherency. Language is the primary channel for this creative process. Discovering what is important in our lives is interwoven with our ability to express this meaning.

²⁹Ibid., p.27.

³⁰See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd. ed. (London: Duckworth, 1985) pp.218-219.

Johann Herder, a major theoretician of the *Sturm und Drang* reacting against the Enlightenment, was one of the first proponents of what Taylor refers to here as *expressivism*.³¹ This describes a particular way of seeing human development whereby the self is defined in the act of its expression. There is a dynamic theory of language accorded to this view which focuses on the creative powers of our communicative skills in interaction. We depend upon language for our thoughts, and to use language in this way is to use it creatively. It is only through language that we can create, and in such terms we create ourselves in interactions with others in a community. While emphasising the importance of this idea in *Hegel*, Taylor brings to bear the moral ramifications of this way of thought in *Sources of the Self* and *The Ethics of Authenticity* by arguing that Herder's *expressivism* is vital for our understanding of a self-satisfaction and self-completion necessitated by a community in terms of self-articulacy and formation in dialogue. Thus to articulate one's moral framework is in a sense to create this framework or one's reason for establishing a moral ontology. This becomes extremely important when Taylor later examines the point of this articulation.³²

Frameworks incorporate a crucial set of 'qualitative distinctions'. As discussed above, qualitative distinctions for Taylor mean those concerned with issues of higher and lower, better and worse, i.e., those kinds of distinctions which involve strong evaluations.

'To think, feel, judge within such a framework is to function with the sense that some action, or mode of life, or mode of feeling is incomparably higher than the others which are more readily available to us. ... The sense of what the difference consists in may take different forms. One form of life may be seen as fuller, another way of feeling and acting as purer, a mode of feeling or living as deeper, a style of life as more admirable, a given demand as making an absolute claim against other merely relative ones, and so on.'³³

³¹This term is borrowed from Isaiah Berlin, to whom Taylor attributes the rescue of Herder from the relative neglect of philosophers. See Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, p. 13, and 'The Importance of Herder' in Taylor's *Philosophical Arguments*.

³²See Chapter 3.

³³*Sources of the Self*, pp.19-20.

Taylor uses the word 'incomparable' here to make an important distinction. His point is that within a framework of higher goods there are ends or goods which are worthy in a way that is distinct from all the others. They cannot be measured on the same scale. It is not that they are merely quantitatively higher, they are not simply *more* good than the average desirabilia. 'Because of their special status they command our awe, respect, or admiration.'³⁴ These are the goods in our lives which function as moral standards.

The Mechanistic Morality

The naturalists whom Taylor addresses above, those who would want to deny any sort of ontological explanation of morality, would also not want to accept the existence of anything like a framework. Taylor points out several reasons why this is the case, which also helps to explain why he himself is in a minority for adhering to a concept of moral realism in the discipline of moral philosophy.

In the introduction to the collection of essays *Human Agency and Language* Taylor describes himself as a monomaniac, or what Isaiah Berlin has called a 'hedgehog'.³⁵ The reason for this is that there is a singularity about his agenda. He is concerned primarily with arguing against the model of studying the human agent based on the natural sciences.³⁶ This agenda is carried over in *Sources of the Self*, particularly when discussing some of the impetus for the naturalist persuasions. As Taylor explains this parallel between the human and natural sciences, it has two key points in history: Plato and Descartes.

Plato's metaphysics sets up a scheme whereby both the physical phenomena of the universe and the human condition are explained by the same ultimate source, viz. the Ideas. The Platonic Idea is a self-manifesting reality. Things in the world are the way they are in order to conform to a rational order, an order involving an 'ontic

³⁴Ibid., p.20.

³⁵See *Human Agency and Language*, p.1.

³⁶See fn. 13.

logos'. Thus natural laws such as gravity and the moral dimension of human beings are both explained according to the nature of ultimate reality.

When these Ideas lose their role in the sciences because we can better explain the cosmos through cause and effect, it is naturally tempting to assume that such Ideas (or any analogous feature) should be replaced in explaining human behaviour. Taylor argues that this is essentially what has happened since the 17th century, largely due to the philosophy of Descartes and his successors:

'Descartes utterly rejected this teleological mode of thinking and abandoned any theory of ontic logos. The universe was to be understood mechanistically, by the resolute/compositive method pioneered by Galileo. This shift in scientific theory ... involved a radical change in anthropology as well. Plato's theory of the Ideas involved a very close relation between scientific explanation and moral vision. One has the correct understanding of both together, one might say, or of neither. If we destroy this vision of the ontic logos and substitute a very different theory of scientific explanation, the entire account of moral virtue and self-mastery has to be transformed as well.'³⁷

The scientific revolution brought with it the notion of 'objective observation'. By this it is meant that the best account of the physical world is one where the subject is disengaged and thereby unbiased. It was thought that approaching the universe in this way would enable the observer to see the world as it really was. Prior to this point the cosmos was considered to have an underlying unity which explained its nature. This was prescinded, however, for a vantage point which sought to study the world without such a 'bias', as it was revealed to the objective agent. It is this kind of scientific examination which sought to explain the world in mechanistic terms, observing various laws of Newtonian physics.

Applying this theory to the realm of human behaviour is what Taylor sees as one of the great errors of modern epistemology.³⁸ Locke was one of the

³⁷*Sources of the Self*, p.144.

³⁸It is interesting to note that Richard Rorty, for example, interprets Locke and Descartes in a similar way, but draws a completely different conclusion (R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). His position is more relativistic in that he would argue that our modern scientific view is one which just happened to take over from the Aristotelian cosmology. In other words not only is there no argument for *not* seeing the human agent through the eyes of scientific explanation, but there can be no final argument for even understanding the physical universe in this way as getting a better grip on the world. It is not necessarily a superior explanation,

first major proponents of what can be called the transapplication of scientific explanation (TSE), which more fully developed Descartes' idea of the disengaged self. This principle underpins the mechanistic treatment of the human sciences in its modern derivatives. The premise is that an understanding of the human can best be accounted for through an objective observer. In the same way that one could explain more thoroughly the intricacies of physical nature by disengaging from any anthropocentric vantage point, so too the individual could account for the various behavioural patterns of the human subject more adequately from the point of view of the 'punctual self'.³⁹ Thus just as the physicist has 'translated' various *muthoi* from Aristotelian cosmology, so too the behavioural scientist has taken features like the realm of the psyche or *anima*, and attempted to describe them purely in terms of action, and external events which can be objectively observed. In so doing they deny the role of any descriptive language which would be limited to our 'internal' constitution. We can therefore no longer use the terms falling in this category such as 'courage' or 'generosity'.

The mechanistic account of the human person would completely decry Taylor's notion of background meaning and ontology. His theory does not fit with a view of the human subject as explained in behaviourism or most modern day philosophical psychologies. Mechanistic explanations and moral ontology are two views that are mutually exclusive. The question is which stance is more convincing and how can we know this?

Much of our modern culture points to a lack of moral frameworks. This could be considered a justifiable defence for the mechanistic explanation of our moral behaviour. Particularly relevant is the modern value of pluralism based on our conception of freedom such that everyone has the right to choose what he or she

just an alternative one. What Taylor argues, however, particularly in 'Explanation and Practical Reason', in *Philosophical Arguments*, is that there are very cogent reasons for seeing the Galilean model as *better* than the Aristotelian model of the universe, since the former explains some of the difficulties and self-contradictions of the latter, and also helps us to 'deal with the world' more adequately in the sense of moving about our physical environment. Conversely, such a mechanistic explanation does not have the same purchase when it comes to understanding the human moral agent and so should be challenged. See also Taylor's essay 'Rorty in the epistemological tradition', in *Ready Rorty*, ed. Alan Malachowski (Oxford: Blackwell's, 1990).

³⁹Taylor uses this term particularly in reference to Locke's understanding that the individual gains rational control of a situation by disengaging from it. See *Sources of the Self*, Chp.9.

wants to be. Taylor argues that this is one of the reasons why utilitarians today are so quick to embrace the affirmation of everyday life, for it seems to counter-act the traditional societal features of clearly defined moral frameworks.⁴⁰ What utilitarians do not realise, however, is that even in this embrace there is a framework implied (though not articulated). The utilitarian may want to escape from moral frameworks by thinking that he can equate this with dethroning the more traditional 'higher' goods, but he has merely superseded these goods with others, concerning everyday values—spending time with family members, providing for those we love, etc. The various theories posited today concerning our human predicament in moral situations are all similar to the mechanistic explanations of behaviour in that they make claims about unpacking the intricacies of our intuitions and strong evaluations, but find that they cannot avoid frameworks and qualitative distinctions.

One of the most condemning criticisms Taylor has against any form of mechanistic explanation is that it does not help us to make sense of the world in which we live, nor does it coincide with the way we talk about moral evaluations. Mechanistic theories such as the stimulus-response models of human behaviour held by behaviourists reduce human intentions to mechanical levels. In doing so they try and abstract certain virtue words such as 'generosity' and replace these with what they consider to be a physicalist explanation of equal value. In Norman Malcolm's words, they make 'no provision for desires, aims, goals, purposes, motives, or intentions. In explaining such an occurrence as a man's walking across a room, it will be a matter of indifference to the theory whether the man's purpose, intention, or desire was to open a window, or even whether his walking across the room was intentional.'⁴¹

In other words mechanistic explanations are 'non-purposive' systems. They can be said to assume the following form:

Whenever an organism of structure *S* is in neurophysiological state *q* it will emit movement *m*.

⁴⁰See *Sources of the Self*, pp.22-24.

⁴¹See Norman Malcolm, 'The Conceivability of Mechanism', in *Free Will*, ed. Gary Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) p.128.

Organism *O* of structure *S* was in neurophysiological state *q*.

Therefore *O* emitted *m*.⁴²

In such a formula someone's actions which I would describe as motivated by courage would be reduced to a neurophysiological phenomenon such as a reactive instinct for survival. Such explanations have two difficulties: they do not describe the value-intrinsic notion of a word like 'courage', and they do not help to explain how we interact in our everyday life. In fact they are very much estranged from any notion of the *real* world.

Taylor is concise and particular in his definition of what is 'real'. He asserts that reality is that which we have to deal with. In other words the real is that which will not go away just because it does not fit with our premonitions and prejudices.⁴³ Thus the languages involved in these mechanistic descriptions do not play a valid part in describing our reality. For if we must use the method of explanation which best fits our reality, and if that reality is that which we must deal with everyday regardless of premonitions, then, if a mechanistic explanation based on the TSE principle seems not to fit with our reality, it should not be adhered to in this form and we should look for another way of explaining our human phenomena. This indicates that Taylor's critique is valid and that modern epistemology has made an erroneous assumption in developing the TSE principle. For between the physical and human sciences there can be no assumed ecumenicity, 'to assume from the superiority of Galilean principles in the sciences of inanimate nature that they *must* provide the model for the science of animate behaviour is to make a speculative leap, not to enunciate a necessary conclusion.'⁴⁴

⁴²Ibid., p.129.

⁴³See *Sources of the Self*, p.59.

⁴⁴This early statement was made in the context of arguing for teleological explanations in human behaviour in *The Explanation of Behaviour* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964) p.25. It should be noted that Taylor does not want to assume that there is never any case for seeing human behaviour in scientific terms. He argues, for example, in 'Peaceful Coexistence in Psychology' in *Human Agency and Language*, p.129, that in the domain of physiological psychology which studies the psycho-physical boundaries of the individual, the classical model of science is the appropriate one.

Personal Identity and the Inescapable Moral Framework

It has been mentioned above that most modern moral hypotheses (the great majority of which are derived from utilitarianism) would censure the frameworks that Taylor uses in establishing a moral ontology. Taylor, on the other hand, must show not only that these frameworks exist, but that they are undeniably linked to human agency. In an attempt to establish this, he argues for a necessary link between our moral frameworks and our personal identities. This argument makes three claims, or, approaching it from another angle, there are three facets to linking the self with the good according to Taylor: as an individual person who sees himself placed in some respect to the good, as a self among other selves, and as one who lives through a narrative.

Contrary to this view, a reductivist position, i.e., one which reduces any talk of 'frameworks' to a physical-mechanical level, is quite a cogent position to hold given the modern 'disenchantment' with established moral norms. There is no longer any need to subscribe to any definitive institutionalised morality such as could be found in Christendom. The reductivist may even want to use this observation in an argument against Taylor. In previous eras there existed an impervious moral framework in an external order which was so strongly conceived that it was quite natural for people to see the moral framework as independent of themselves. Yet this has now faded and become obsolete so that the key question is not 'can I live up to this standard?' (in fear of condemnation), but 'is there any standard at all?'. It could be argued that the very fact that something so strongly posited has been rejected indicates that we are dealing with a concept not grounded in the nature of things, but one subject to human interpretation.

Contrary to this persuasive claim, Taylor argues that it is utterly impossible for us to do away with moral frameworks which incorporate qualitative distinctions. Furthermore, this is not a mere contingent fact, but depends ultimately on who we are as human beings. His claim, as cited above, 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 recognise as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood.’⁴⁵

It is clear from this that Taylor’s moral theory is intricately related to his philosophy of mind, and more specifically to his concept of the person. In this concept he distances himself from most of the modern philosophical positions in the philosophy of mind. In one sense Taylor refuses to accept the issues voiced in the modern discussion of identity as they are articulated in philosophy. Modern philosophical thought promotes three fundamental stances towards the person’s identity: materialism, dualism, or idealism. The materialist holds that there is nothing constitutive of the person outside of the physical body, that thoughts are equal to brain states, and that the mind is to be identified with the body (and more basically, the brain matter).⁴⁶ The dualist would hold that there are two separate entities, the body and the soul, and that in some way these interact, but are conceptually independent of one another.⁴⁷ The idealist would hold that everything is immaterial formulations of the mind or, in the case the panpsychic, that everything *is* mind.⁴⁸

Taylor denies the legitimacy of defining a person in these kind of ‘objective’ terms.⁴⁹ If we say that a person is merely his brain functions, we ignore a great deal of what is implicit to his identity in terms of values and intentions. With idealism we do the same by neglecting the important aspects of the physical realm.

Cartesian dualism may seem a way of embracing both extremes, and a great majority of Christian thinkers from Descartes onwards have clung to this presupposition. One need only look as far as Koestler’s universally recognised catchphrase ‘The Ghost in the machine’ to understand the pervasiveness of this concept in theology.⁵⁰ Dualism is practically indoctrinated into our idea of the immaterial soul, so much so that when philosophers discussing the issue of personal identity in

⁴⁵*Sources of the Self*, p. 27.

⁴⁶For materialist arguments see D. Davidson, *Essays on Action and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), esp. ‘Mental Events’, pp. 207-225.

⁴⁷For the classic articulation of dualism see René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 1 & 2.

⁴⁸See particularly Timothy Sprigge, *The Vindication of Absolute Idealism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983).

⁴⁹See his early article ‘Mind-body identity, a side issue?’, *Philosophical Review*, 26:2, 1967, pp.201-213.

⁵⁰See Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine* (London: Hutchinson, 1967).

dualistic terms want to throw some conceptual light on the subject, they often take the example of the Christian soul surviving the body after death.⁵¹ Fergus Kerr, writing about the impact of Wittgenstein's philosophy on theology, has pointed out that even with the tremendous challenges Wittgenstein makes to our traditional concepts of identity, there is still this tendency to value the dualist theory of a person, particularly in writers like Karl Rahner who build Cartesian epistemologies into their very systematics.⁵²

Contrary to most Christian thinkers, Taylor sees Cartesian metaphysical dualism as a sham illusion which is responsible for many of the modern misconceptions of sociology and the human sciences. He argues that Descartes, in positing a mental state which would stand up against the rigour of his method of doubt when all material things around him had fallen, established a skewed dichotomy which has been the burden of philosophical investigation ever since. This led not only to the notion of the mind becoming 'disengaged' from the body in some objective realm, but it can also be seen as responsible for the monist materialism which identifies the mind with brain states. Taylor argues for a more complete picture of the person, one which is more comprehensively engaging. He refuses to see the identity of the individual in terms of the self-contained soul or body, but instead argues for an explanation which will include the self as an experiencing, social agent.

Taylor aligns himself with philosophers like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty who have challenged the concept of a completely objectified and disparate realm of the self (or pure reason) as compatible with the way we understand the world.⁵³ Alongside this challenge is the Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations* who argues against the dualistic notion of action which seeks to construct an internal act of will causing an external movement.⁵⁴

⁵¹See for example, Antony Flew, ed., *Body, Mind, and Death* (London: Macmillan, 1964).

⁵²See Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell's, 1986). See also Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1978).

⁵³See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (London: SCM Press, 1962) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).

⁵⁴See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell's, 1958).

So in one very important sense, Taylor refuses to play by the rules set up by the reputable philosophers engaged in the question of personal identity, those like Ryle, Kripke, Putnam, or Davidson. Even the Anglican Professor of Christian Philosophy, Richard Swinburne, famous for his well-argued scientific defences of the Christian faith, holds to an unbending Cartesian Dualism.⁵⁵ Rejection of this dualism colours Taylor's epistemology, philosophy of action, and certainly his ethics. In establishing his argument for moral frameworks, Taylor's philosophy of mind describes the human person in terms which are relevant to the way we experience our lives in our moral frameworks.

To answer the question 'who am I?' is not to describe myself in certain physical terms and subsequently certain mental terms or even vice versa. Borrowing a phrase from Timothy Sprigge, Thomas Nagel points out that even if we had all the facts that existed about a certain creature, such as a bat, we would still not know 'what it is like to be' a bat.⁵⁶ We would merely have the information, not the experience. Beyond scientific, objective information there is in Sprigge's dictum something about the individual that tells us 'what it is like to be' that individual.⁵⁷

To answer the question 'who am I?' involves understanding what is important for me. Rousseau calls this dimension of the self the inner moral voice. Taylor refers to it as our moral horizons or frameworks. The true 'sentiment de l'existence' is in intimate contact with this voice.⁵⁸ As mentioned above, Taylor describes personal identity as tantamount to knowing where I stand in relation to certain things within my framework or horizon. Knowing who I am means knowing what my commitments are.⁵⁹

⁵⁵It should be interesting to note that Richard Swinburne's background is in the Philosophy of Science and the bias in scientific investigation towards objectification and disengaged reason may go some way towards accounting for this viewpoint of the person. See Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

⁵⁶See Thomas Nagel, 'What is it like to be a Bat?', *Philosophical Review*, 1974, 83, pp.435-450.

⁵⁷See Timothy Sprigge, 'The Importance of Subjectivity', Inaugural Address for Accepting Chair of Logic and Metaphysics Professorship, Edinburgh University, Spring, 1978. See also his *The Vindication of Absolute Idealism*.

⁵⁸J. J. Rousseau, *Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire*, Ve Promenade, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol.1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1959) p.1047.

⁵⁹See *Sources of the Self*, p.27.

Moral Orientation

Here the link that Taylor establishes between identity and morality is quite clear. What we value in our lives creates for us a horizon of meaning within which we can define ourselves. Orientation within this horizon is a particularly important feature of our identity inasmuch as our identity depends upon knowing where we stand. To have a personal identity is to be situated in a moral space. To be situated in a moral space is to be able to answer questions which arise about the good. So in some sense my identity, who I am as a person, is tied to my beliefs, but also the *expression* of these beliefs.

Clearly the Herderian approach to language as expressive and creative is undergirding this formulation of personal identity. As an intricate part of determining my own personal values, the creative process involved in forming my moral backdrop can be seen as vitally linked to the concept of discovering my 'self' as in some sense a creative process. To put it another way, in seeing *what* I am, I am simultaneously defining what it is to be 'me'.

This leads quite distinctly to the second way Taylor sees the self being linked to the good—through interaction with other people in a community. The idea that the human agent exists in a space of moral questions, that the person is constitutively linked to a moral framework which provides the necessary answers to these moral questions is one that is incontrovertible for Taylor. The formulation of these frameworks is what is referred to as 'moral reasoning', and this always happens dialogically. For Taylor, it is important to understand the moral agent as interlocutor—'One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it.'⁶⁰

The reason for this depends upon the nature of language. We first learn our language from others. We take up their language and use it, so that when we speak in dialogue the objects we refer to become for us 'public' or 'common'.⁶¹ When I talk to

⁶⁰Ibid., p.35.

⁶¹See Charles Taylor, 'Theories of Meaning', in *Human Agency and Language*.

someone else about the weather I do not begin with a reference to my weather and let her respond with references to her own. Our common language creates for us a public space. In this way the public feature of the self amidst other selves cannot be just a contingent matter, for we are introduced into personhood by being initiated into such a language. In moral reasoning I can learn what things like anger, hope, love, peace, etc. are through the experience I have of these being objects for *us* in some common space. Even as adults it is sometimes important for us to articulate what we are thinking to someone else in order to clarify what it is we mean, or what may be implicit within our thought process. The self, while an individual, cannot be a self on its own.

Herder, while accentuating the individual 'measure' (*eigenes Maß*) of each person, and while emphasising the endowed qualities of each to develop a specific type of *Humanität*, nevertheless understood the importance of the self's dependence upon others: 'just as there is no such thing as an isolated faculty of reason, so there is no man who has become all he is entirely by his own efforts ... he, and the philosopher, cannot but recognise that the whole chain of human development is characterised by man's dependence on his fellows.'⁶²

There is a paradox here which one can trace back to Rousseau and Kant. Both philosophers stress the importance of the individual moral self being responsible for his own development, while also recognising a significant, social-universal whole to which we all belong. Rousseau, while advocating the guidance of the inner voice of an individual, also argues that there is a general will of the community and stresses the importance of this collectivist idea in moral decisions and development.⁶³ Kant, who gained much from Rousseau, also sees the individual as morally significant in his own right, but postulates a categorical imperative to which all men are bound.⁶⁴ Self-determination, then, is balanced by a recognised dependency on other moral agents as one understands oneself as part of a cohesive social order.

⁶²J. G. Herder, *Ideen*, vii.I. in *Herders Sämtliche Werke*, vol. XIII, ed. Bernard Suphan, 15 vols. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877-1913). See also F. M. Barnard, ed., *J. G. Herder on Social and Political Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) p.311.

⁶³See Rousseau, *Les Rêveries du Promeneur solitaire*, Ve Promenade, p.1045.

⁶⁴See Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp.105-130.

The modern value of freedom and individuality underpins one of the objections to Taylor's assertion that the self must exist among other selves. Taylor spends a significant amount of time in *Sources of the Self* outlining the evolution of this value, and like much of the content of modernity he applauds the ideal, yet rejects the misguided ramifications. So, for example, he argues that the fact that our identity as selves depends upon others in no way infringes on our freedom as individuals in the way that a libertarian may want to assert.⁶⁵

As indicated above, Taylor makes his point clear by highlighting certain inescapable features of language. We develop as selves through dialogue with others, in what Taylor refers to as 'webs of interlocution'. Those whom we interact with in our lives are the people George Herbert Mead has called the 'significant others'.⁶⁶ They are those whose 'roles' we pick up in developing the individual self. In this way human life is fundamentally dialogical in nature.

Someone who comes closer to Taylor's own beliefs (Mead is too much of a behaviourist) is Wilhelm von Humboldt. He sees a balance in language between on the one hand a created and recreated phenomenon issuing forth in conversation, and on the other hand a concrete form of communication anchored to individuals and their different perspectives. So we do not have a conversation as merely 'causally related monologues', but at the same time we cannot shift too far in the other direction and insist that a conversation is merely an unfolding of a cohesive superstructure which takes no account of the specific persons.⁶⁷

In this balance we define our selves as human agents, both in orientating ourselves in a moral space, and in formulating this space with other selves. So we are persons in so far as we know where we stand, and we know those around us who

⁶⁵Or for that matter, the way Habermas would argue that this infringes upon individual freedom. See Stanley Raffel, *Habermas, Lyotard, and the Concept of Justice* (London: Macmillan, 1992) and Michael Sandel, *Justice and the Limits of Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁶⁶See G. H. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, ed. Charles Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934) pp.156ff.

⁶⁷See W. Humboldt, *Ueber die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues*, cited in Charles Taylor, 'Theories of Meaning', in *Human Agency and Language*. See in this same volume 'Language and Human Nature', also, Jerome Bruner, 'The Transactional Self' in *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

share this space. There is a third facet to how we exist as persons in a moral space and this has to do with the dynamics of time and experience.

Moral Maps and Legends

Taylor points out that there are two ways that we can see ourselves as orientated, as knowing where we are. This follows clearly from the inverse observation that there are two ways that we can be lost in our surroundings. The first way is as a stranger, completely unfamiliar with the environment. This sort of disorientation can easily be remedied with a map. So for example, if I am in the city of Florence where my surroundings are unfamiliar to me and I want to find the Duomo, in order to do so I could ask a Florentine where the cathedral is and they would give me directions (hopefully) to get there. This brings up an important point about orientating myself in this way. For the Florentine must give me directions with reference to where I am at the time that he is giving me these directions. If we are standing in front of the Ponte Vecchio, his 'map' must begin there and take me from that point to the Duomo. As Taylor points out, it would do me no good whatsoever to have this person blindfold me, take me up into a helicopter and as we pass the cathedral say, 'there it is,' while ripping off the blindfold. In one sense I know where I am at that moment, but not in any meaningful way. I still cannot place the Duomo in relation to other objects in the known world—I would still be lost.

The second way of being lost is as a native of the territory which is already familiar to you. So to take the Florence example again, a native of the city may know it quite well, may have lived there all her life, yet may suddenly find herself on an unfamiliar street, so that in the distance she can see the Duomo, yet she is uncertain from which direction she is approaching it. So, in the first instance the foreigner has a good description of where he is (at least from his aerial perspective) but lacks a map to orientate himself. In the second instance the native has the map to orientate herself, viz. the familiarity of the area, yet lacks the knowledge of where she is situated on this map.

By analogy Taylor argues that placing ourselves in relation to the good requires orientation in both of these ways. Not only do we need to know the surrounding moral countryside which shapes our concepts of the qualitatively higher, but we also need to know where we stand in relation to the ultimate moral landmarks. In combination these two ways of being orientated in moral space indicate that one of the most fundamental aspirations for human beings is the need to be in touch with what they think has value. This is simply another way of formulating Taylor's original premise that human identity is intricately connected with what one sees as meaningful, viz., the good. It is this good which will define spiritual orientation and thus by which one measures the 'meaning' and worth of one's life. This is a crucial amalgamation for Taylor since he takes the second axis of strong evaluation which concerns questions about the meaningful values of life, and speaks of it as indissolubly linked to spiritual and moral positioning so that in the end any questions we have about what gives meaning to our lives are going to be questions about how we are 'placed' or 'situated' with relation to the good.

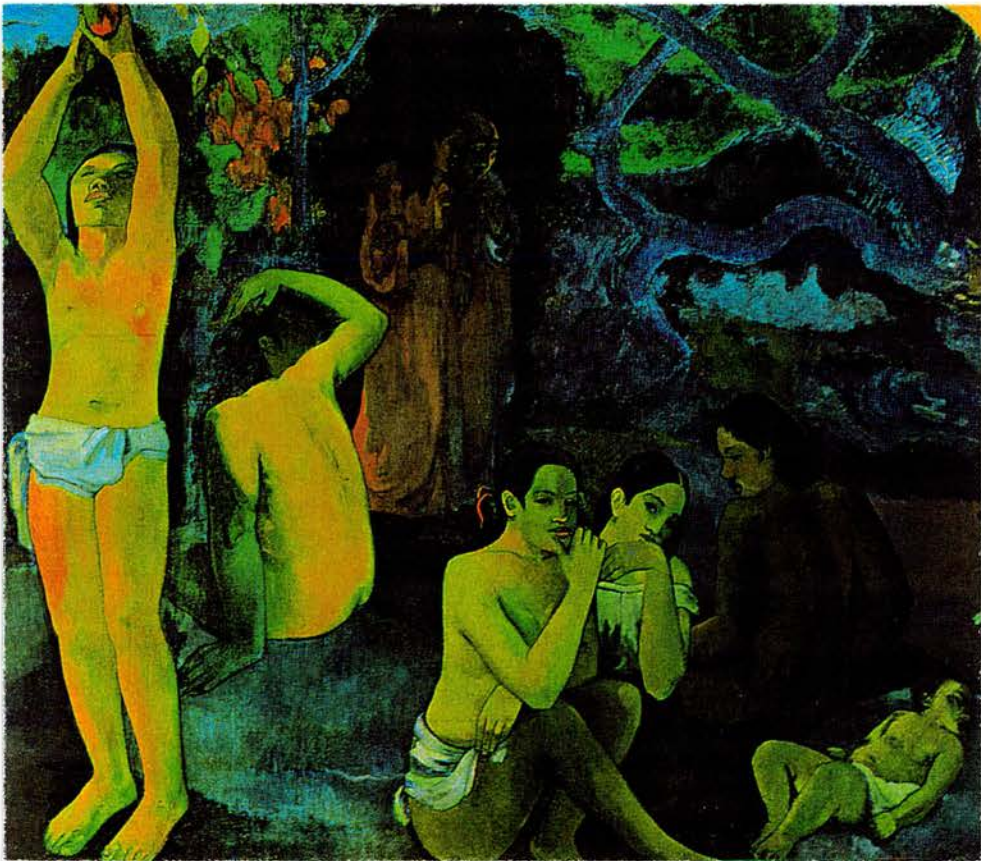
Underlying this spiritual orientation is the absolute question of whether we are moving towards or away from the good in our moral space. Understanding this movement means getting a sense of either approaching the good or moving away from it. We can affirm or disaffirm this movement—'yes, I am moving closer', 'no, I am not.'

This brings into play the third facet of the self's connection with the good, that of experiencing life as a *narrative*. Given that we are faced with this inevitable yes/no question because of the direction of our lives, we must understand our identity as dynamic—our lives move. We are constantly changing and becoming, and thus our lives can never be defined by what we *are* in isolation from what we *were* and what we *shall be*. Paul Gauguin's enigmatic masterpiece frames the predicament: *D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?* (figs. 1 and 2). As such we do not see our lives as disjointed events, but as an unfolding story.⁶⁸ Here the analogue from topographical orientation is fully recognised. The stranger needs to fit the location of the Duomo into his life as a narrative and for this reason having the

⁶⁸See *Sources of the Self*, p.47.



1. Paul Gauguin, *D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?* (detail of left half), 1897, Fine Arts Museum, Boston



2. Paul Gauguin, *D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?* (detail of right half), 1897, Fine Arts Museum, Boston

Duomo instantaneously appear before his eyes does him no good whatsoever. For the issue becomes for us not only where we *are*, but where we are *going* as well as where we have *been*. Just as we need this information to find the Duomo of Florence, so we need to understand this moral information about ourselves in order to find the good.

Taylor notes that it has been argued by many (particularly Ricouer and MacIntyre) that making sense of one's life as a narrative is not a contingent optional extra, but a fundamental necessity, that to understand who we are we have to have a notion of how we have become and where we are going.⁶⁹ I project the direction of my life in terms of possible destinations, and look to proceed towards the good. So I understand my life both in terms of what I am now and also what I intend to become.

Teleology and Personal Identity

There is an implicit function of the teleological explanation here which accounts for why it was such an important point to establish in Taylor's early work, *The Explanation of Behaviour*. For if part of the way we understand our lives must be in terms of where we are going and what good we are projecting ourselves towards, there must be involved in this a notion of the *telos*. It is interesting to note that both Plato and Aristotle use the term *το τέλος* to connote the good so often that it eventually became synonymous with *το αγαθον*, the chief good.⁷⁰ In Latin this idea was carried over by Cicero's *finis bonorum*.⁷¹ Aristotle saw the function (*το εργον*) of the human agent in terms of the teleological explanation of 'well-being' (*ευδαιμονια*). It is clear in this context how Taylor's previously articulated philosophy of action, which argues against any stimulus-response theory of behaviour, aligns itself with his more fully developed moral theory that understands human beings as defined by the goods of a moral horizon.

⁶⁹See P. Ricouer, *Time and Narrative*, 2 vols., trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), and Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. Another important source for this is Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959).

⁷⁰See particularly *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk.I.

⁷¹See Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum*, trans. H. Rackham, 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann Press, 1951) I.12, III.7.

Knowing who we are also involves knowing where we have come from. There is in the sense of becoming also the orientating aspect of how we got where we are. This seems clear from the first example of orientation where being presented with the Duomo would be meaningless without the experience of having arrived. Or, using an example from Taylor, if, after coming out of a local store, I suddenly find myself in front of the Taj Mahal, I would not conclude that I have been transported to the city of Agra, but would look for an explanation which better fit with the narrative of my life at that point, i.e., how I got to where I was at that moment.⁷² In other words, part of the sense of this being the genuine Taj Mahal would depend upon how it was that I arrived there.

So with the less trivial instances in our lives, when we are not merely shopping for our weekly groceries, but are striving towards some life goal, we are set in a narrative of understanding, both of how we got there and where we are going, what Heidegger calls the past and future 'ekstaseis'.⁷³ This implies an important philosophical truth about the unity of our lives. Philosophers like Derek Parfit deny any sort of a priori unity to human existence.⁷⁴ Parfit insists that it is perfectly feasible to view as a separate person myself when I was eight and myself when I was eighteen. Joseph Butler, in an attempt to critique Locke's theory of personal identity, (which is what Parfit is building upon) describes it thus:

'personality is not a permanent, but a transient thing: that it lives and dies, begins and ends continually: that no one can any more remain one and the same person two moments together, than two successive moments can be one and the same moment: that our substance is indeed continually changing ...'⁷⁵

Contrary to the traditional suppositions and understandings of the Philosophy of Mind, however, we cannot picture the self as a studied 'object' in the way we would go about examining something scientifically, and hope to give a full and adequate account of the person. There is no sense in the self being understood as an object to be known through this type of investigation, and in so far as Parfit posits an

⁷²See *Sources of the Self*, p.48.

⁷³See *Being and Time*, div. II, chps.3&4.

⁷⁴See Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁷⁵Joseph Butler, 'Of Personal Identity' as cited in Antony Flew, ed., *Body, Mind, and Death*, p.167

objective, disengaged self, his argument is flawed. The self that is defined by Parfit, and originally by Locke's criterion of self-awareness, is what Taylor calls the 'punctual' or 'neutral' self. He uses this term to distinguish it as a self which is defined in abstraction from any constitutive concerns, and therefore completely different from any *identity* in the sense in which he himself is using the concept. This is the self that Hume could not find when he writes 'I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception.' Eventually he is resigned to seeing the self as a bundle of experiences.⁷⁶

From his discussion of frameworks and moral orientation, the building crescendo of Taylor's argument moves into a new position. Before discussing this it would prove helpful if the thesis as formulated thus far could be summarised. Initially, Taylor took the argument through several dialectical steps exploring the underlying presumptions of our moral intuitions. Emerging from this was an established moral ontology which grounds and makes sense of these intuitions. A further expression of the argument came to view this ontology in terms of 'exploring the frameworks which articulate our sense of orientation in the space of questions about the good.'⁷⁷ While this progressive dialectical interpretation of moral ontology fleshes out the various features of the qualitative distinctions which make sense of our moral reactions, and helps to critique the naturalist viewpoint which has no room for any sort of moral realism, it still does not indicate how indispensable moral frameworks are to us. Thus from this stage Taylor argues for establishing these qualitative distinctions as definitive in terms of orientating the self in a moral space. Who we are is somehow defined by our relation to the good, and Taylor points to three ways that this is true: the individual self as defined by the good, the self as defined by other selves in the dialogical nature of life (and particularly human moral reasoning), and finally, the self as defined teleologically by the good in life as an

⁷⁶David Hume, 'Of Personal Identity', *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Bk. 1, Pt. iv, sect. vi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1888).

⁷⁷*Sources of the Self*, p. 41.

unfolding story. As Taylor, himself, sums up where he is at this point in his argument, he explains that:

‘ ... because we cannot but orient ourselves to the good, and thus determine our place relative to it, and hence determine the direction of our lives, we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form as a ‘quest’. But one could perhaps start from another point: because we have to determine our place in relation to the good, therefore we cannot be without an orientation to it, and hence must see our life in story. From whichever direction, I see these conditions as connected facets of the same reality, inescapable structural requirements of human agency.’⁷⁸

⁷⁸Ibid., pp.51-52.

CHAPTER TWO



Moral Reasoning

The Problem of Projectionism

The essential point that Taylor has established thus far is that there is an undeniable link between the good and how we define our lives as human agents. Moving on from this he then wants to apply this concept of the good to commonplace moral beliefs and judgements. He seeks an answer to the question ‘what role in moral reasoning can we give those qualitative distinctions which define ourselves?’. Iris Murdoch, in her work *The Sovereignty of Good* was the first to distinguish between general, more abstract moral terms such as ‘the good’ and concrete descriptives such as ‘bravery’, ‘chastity’, ‘benevolence’ etc.¹ Bernard Williams makes the same distinction between the ‘moral’ and the ‘ethical’ respectively.² In wanting to find a place for qualitative distinctions in moral reasoning Taylor is concerned to apply them to the sphere of ethics as Williams understands it—the ‘undivided category of considerations which we employ to answer questions about how we should live.’³ In other words he wants to understand how our concept of the good relates to our everyday moral considerations.

His initial answer to this query is that qualitative distinctions underpin our beliefs by giving reasons for these beliefs. Value terms such as courage or freedom

¹See I. Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, pp.77ff.

²See B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985).

³*Sources of the Self*, p.53.

give reasons for certain moral tenets we hold to be true. The difficulty is that this is not an extremely helpful answer (even if it is true) unless an account can be given of what it means to give a *reason* for a certain moral value. At this point there is a problem with 'thick' virtue terms which stems from much of the criticism lobbied against what G. E. Moore called the 'naturalistic fallacy'.⁴ According to these criticisms, when we are using thick virtue terms we are 'projecting' values onto a reality which is in effect neutral. In this sense these values which help us to make sense of how we live our lives should not be considered substantive features of the 'real' world, but merely pragmatic functioning qualities of our own human make-up.

Most naturalism that Taylor is confronting adheres to some kind of projectionism (which is slightly confusing since projectionism arises out of the criticism of the 'naturalistic fallacy'), and he points out two specific ways that projectionists can understand these thick terms. First, one can see the value as a voluntary projection which can subsequently be reinterpreted in a purely descriptive manner. This is prominent for example in R. M. Hare's prescriptivism.⁵ According to Hare we can segregate two levels of meaning—the descriptive and the prescriptive—given the logic of our value terms. Ethical language is a subset of prescriptive language. Thus these values can be interpreted on a level of meaning, *viz.* actions, situations, qualities, in purely non-prescriptive terms. Essentially, this is also what lies behind the emotivist concept of meaning—when we say that something is the 'right' thing to do we are in effect saying that it is the *desired* thing to do. Thus the statement, 'that was a very brave thing she did,' can presumably be translated so that the virtue of bravery becomes synonymous with some or other physical, descriptive explanation. In fact this same reduction exercise occurs in most behavioural theories where the scientific observer translates any evaluative (or teleological) term into a purely non-prescriptive vocabulary.

Taylor of course cannot sympathise with such a view since it is incompatible with our understanding of human experience. Like so much of his philosophy, this

⁴See G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903).

⁵See R. M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963) and Taylor's *The Explanation of Behaviour*.

line is predetermined by more fundamental issues of philosophical anthropology. For if we are arguing against the ideas promoted by behavioural scientists and cognitive functional materialists which consider explanations to be isolatable and interpretable in a purely physicalist schema, how then can we allow such a prescriptivist assertion as Hare's to go unchallenged?⁶

The second way that morality could be a projection is in an involuntary way which involves seeing virtue terms as analogous to secondary properties of the world. For example, we can see the truth possibility of the statement 'the grass is green' but realise that if there were no such thing as sighted beings there would be no such things as colours. Colours are in one sense a projection onto an external neutral world. In the same way we can understand that values such as freedom could be projections, which, if there were no such beings as moral agents in the universe, would not exist. We as humans place this value on the neutral universe in order to function within it.

Seeing thick value terms as projections is appealing in that it supposedly gives the individual a clearer vantage point from which to assess his or her moral predicament. It brings them out of the subjective, mismangeable realm of a specific perspective and places them, in some way, in a 'God's-eye-view'. From this point they can be 'maximally reflective and rational' about their value system. In the first case this would entail translating certain terms into strictly descriptive meanings. It would be a more objective and logical way of approaching what we really mean when we use thick value terms. In the second way of projection this would mean encapsulating the underlying reality of causally necessary and sufficient criteria which we are attempting to describe when we use such thick terms—when we have these 'coloured' experiences of value. This would mean describing virtues such as generosity in a way which would flesh out the underlying survival purchase of the action.⁷ I give generously of my time to my children both because they are part of my

⁶It should be noted that Hare at least does allow for certain irreducible imperatives in his logic of language. Others such as Peter Geach thought that 'good' could be translated into descriptive terms in all contexts. See the discourse between Geach and Hare in Geach's 'Good and Evil', *Analysis*, 17, 1956, pp.33-42 and Hare's 'Geach: Good and Evil', *Analysis*, 18, 1957, pp.103-112.

⁷See *Sources of the Self*, pp.54f.

flesh and blood (ensuring my own genetic survival) but also possibly so that they will return the favour to me when I am old and frail. Causally descriptive thick virtue terms such as 'love' or 'compassion' are replaced here by a description of the underlying 'reality'.⁸

As mentioned above, these projectionist theories have been popular with most naturalists where there is a denial of any 'real' moral realm apart from the human agent. There are, however, some devastating arguments against this view, most relying on the difficulty in understanding how we could derive any ethical conclusion from premises which are non-ethical. Bridging the gap between 'fact' on one side and 'value' on the other has proved to be an impossible task for the naturalist who would want to project values onto a neutral backdrop. Hume describes this conundrum in his *Treatise*:

'In every system of morality which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surprised to find, that instead of the usual compilations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, it is necessary that it should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers; and am persuaded, that this small attention would subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects, nor is perceived by reason.'⁹

Hume's famous distinction of *is* and *ought* recognises that *fact* cannot be translated into *value* without some sort of external qualification. Turning this on its head we can see that it is just as confusing to attempt a leap from the prescriptive

⁸For an articulation of this in the biological sciences see Richard Dawkins' *The Blind Watchmaker* (London: Penguin, 1988).

ought or *ought not* to the descriptive *is* or *is not*. Iris Murdoch and more systematically John McDowell have shown that for certain moral terms, particularly these ‘thick’ description values, there does not seem to be any equivalent non-evaluative term available.¹⁰

Returning to Taylor’s initial question of what it means to give a reason for a belief, it becomes clear that purely descriptive terms fall short when one attempts to apply them in moral reasoning. For if I try to describe my respect for courage in purely neutral language two things will happen: first I will be unable to communicate why it is that courage is good and desirable as a virtue term, and secondly, the individual who I am describing this virtue to (who must in this instance be a neutral person, i.e., having no preconceived notion of linking the virtue with the good in any way) will be unable to *reapply* the virtue term in new situations based solely on my description. He or she would not be able to take my description of courage and apply it in a completely new context so that he or she can then identify this virtue in someone else. This problem of the ‘neutral man’ has been cogently argued by Bernard Williams in his book *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, someone Taylor relies on in his argument against the projectionists. As Taylor notes, this indispensable feature of the thick value term (what he calls qualitative distinctions), means that in so far as the first order of projection is concerned, the dry language of pure description does not encapsulate the entire meaning of the term. The descriptive cannot be separated from the evaluative. Hare’s two levels of meaning are co-dependent in this way. As far as the second approach to projectionism is concerned, what this means is that we cannot take value terms to be analogous to secondary properties. They are not necessarily separate and distinct from the neutral world in the same way that colour, for example, may be argued to be.

⁹Book III, pt. ii, sect. i.

¹⁰See Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, and John McDowell, ‘Virtue and Reason’, *The Monist*, 62, 1979, pp.331-50. See also Taylor’s own exposition of this view in ‘Neutrality in Political Science’, in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*.

Taylor's Argument Against Projectionism

How then do we function as moral agents? Going back to the beginning of this chapter it is still not clear what it means to use reason to arrive at or affirm moral stances. All that Taylor has established is that value terms cannot be deconstructed down to a more 'objective' level of description. To re-engage with this question he focuses a final assault on the projectionist theories collectively and makes two important qualifying assertions which any moral theory must live up to:

'1. You cannot help having recourse to these strongly valued goods for the purposes of life: deliberating, judging situations, deciding how you feel about people, and the like. The 'cannot help' here is not like the inability to stop blinking when someone waves a fist in your face ... It means rather that you need these terms to make the best sense of what you're doing. By the same token these terms are indispensable to the kind of explanation and understanding of self and others that is interwoven with these life uses: assessing his conduct, grasping her motivation, coming to see what you were really about all these years, etc.

2. What is real is what you have to deal with, what won't go away just because it doesn't fit with your prejudices. By this token, what you can't help having recourse to in life is real, or as near to reality as you can get a grasp of at present. Your general metaphysical picture of 'values' and their place in 'reality' ought to be based on what you find real in this way. It couldn't conceivably be the basis of an *objection* to its reality.'¹¹

As far as the first point is concerned, any theory which purports to describe our experiences and situations, our ethical motivations and expressions, in terms which exclude strongly valued goods is missing a vital ingredient which is essential if we are to make any sense of what has meaning for us. Thus projectionist theories which attempt to reduce our language to non-evaluative terms impale themselves on the first horn of this argument, for they ignore certain terms which we need in our lives in order to understand certain situations or assess possible courses of action or determine how we really feel about certain people.

¹¹*Sources of the Self*, p.59.

What is partially to blame for the naturalist presuppositions is the post-Galilean scientific system in conspiracy with Platonism. Since Plato understood the ultimate explanation of both Ethics and Science to lie in the Ideas, it became easy to see these Ideas as affirming the objective, ontological status of each of these disciplines. Thus when modern scientific explanation prescinded this status in the sciences, it naturally followed suit that the same status should be dropped in Ethics.

But as Taylor points out, this is an unsubstantiated prejudice, and impales itself on the second horn of his argument. For in these thick description terms lies a kind of reality that will not go away for the naturalists even though they attempt to dismiss it as not fitting in with their preconceived hypotheses of how things should be. Of course this reality will not be part of any physical theory of the universe. This does not mean, however, that it is any less 'real'. Rather it implies that making sense of our lives in human reality should not be explained in terms which are appropriate for physics.

So one can see from his criticism of projectionist theories that Taylor wants to affirm a dynamic role for terms such as 'freedom' and 'dignity' in so much as they are necessary for understanding reality. He lays this out very clearly when he asks the rhetorical question: 'What better measure of reality do we have in human affairs than those terms which on critical reflection and after correction of the errors we can detect make the best sense of our lives?'¹² The point of this probing question is that until we have a collection of terms which can replace these value terms by giving a better explanation of who we are as human moral agents and how we live our lives, these terms give the best account we have, and no epistemological or metaphysical bias should trump this account. This is what Taylor calls the BA (best account) principle—what it means to 'make sense' of our lives entails giving the best account we can at any given time in the terms which are indispensable for this account. If it so happens that a better, more clairvoyant, explanation arises, this should replace the previous account.

¹²Ibid., p.57.

With this argument Taylor not only addresses those projectionists such as Hare or Mackie who see values projected in the two ways discussed in this chapter, but it also critiques those forms of naturalism mentioned in chapter one: the ‘simple naturalism’ or subjectivism which sees our moral reactions as identical to purely visceral ones, and those theories which would see our notion of the good as opinions on an issue which is ultimately optional (such as the character of Roxana described by Mark Twain). It seems that all of these theories which attempt to see our moral judgements as projections fall afoul of this BA principle. Thus, if non-realism of this kind cannot be supported by our moral experience, there is no reason to embrace it.

The BA principle goes part of the way to answering what it means to give a *reason* for something. For in given situations this is exactly how practical reasoning works. The moral agent takes whatever makes the best sense of the matter at any given time and clings to this. There may come a point of what MacIntyre calls ‘epistemological crisis’ when this belief is shown to be false, or can be replaced by something which makes more sense of more of the data.¹³ In this case the agent moves from his old view to a more tenable one. Thus one can understand moral reasoning as fundamentally *transitional*. In order to discern how one can use moral terms in making judgements about things Taylor asserts two normative conditions which form a background to any such term. First one must understand the general social mechanics of the particular culture—the common purposes, mutual needs, ‘how things can go well or badly between people’, etc. Secondly, one must have some grasp of the perceptions of the good that others using this moral language have, i.e., one must understand what he calls ‘qualitative distinctions in the society.’¹⁴

Some terms may coincide with certain socially defined obligations, such as the forbidding of murder, and in such cases it is not necessary to understand both features of this background. Killing, stealing, etc. ‘are shaped in part by the functional requirements of any human society.’¹⁵ Hence we do not need to understand the negation of these as a common purpose of the society in order to

¹³See Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science’, *Monist*, 60, 1977, p.453.

¹⁴*Sources of the Self*, pp.54f.

desire a social life which seeks to minimise violence. Most of the terms we use, however, require both forms of consideration. Words like 'freedom' and 'benevolence' are defined both in terms of social consideration as well as individual understandings of the good.

Sophisticated Naturalism

Once this is said there is still room for a certain kind of subjectivism in the guise of relativism, and it is exactly this position that Bernard Williams tries to argue in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Some would classify Williams as a realist, or at least not an anti-realist; however, he still maintains that there must be a distinction between 'fact' and 'value' in ethics. Williams, unlike most naturalists, does not want to deny that ethical statements like 'murder is wrong' have a truth value, but what he does want to deny is that they have one *non-perspectivally*. Human societies differ greatly in culture and values. They each express a unique way of being human, and it may be possible that when the values expressed in these different cultures clash there is no way of arbitrating between them. Since our language of the good and the right makes sense only against a background of social interchange and its perceptions of the good in that culture, it seems clear to Williams that these goods are merely relative.¹⁶ So, for example, he thinks that it would be wrong for us to condemn the human sacrifices of the Aztec people, since we are not part of their culture. The goods and values do not need to be seen as projections in such a theory as much as culturally bound and limited. They can be real, but they are relative.¹⁷

In order to analyse the possibility of 'relativism' one must understand that there are two ways to define the term. First, there could be a value in a certain culture

¹⁵Ibid., p.55.

¹⁶As mentioned above, Rorty holds a similar position to this, see his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

¹⁷Williams, himself, does not think they are real in the way that science is real, but here his argument is condemned by Taylor's definition of reality. Even if he did believe in some moral ontology, it would be of a relativistic nature, which is what Taylor is addressing.

which is relative to the point of being completely incomprehensible to those outside that culture. It may be possible that there are different kinds of human realisation which are totally incommensurable. This means that as far as moral reasoning is concerned there is no way of getting from the one view to the other with a clear transition. Taylor believes that this predicament is possible, but he does not think that it is true. In other words he believes *de dicto* that such a state of affairs could exist, but there is no *de re* possibility this could refer to.¹⁸

From a theological point of view this could be further strengthened by resorting back to Taylor's denial of any 'fact/value' distinction. For if there is such a denial to relativism, then William's neutral man, although logically possible, is incredible. With the doctrine of creation we can assert *a fortiori* that there is an ontological precedent or *fact* in humanity which negates any chance of neutrality. Regardless of our stance on total depravity this must be seen to be true if we are to understand man as having any kind of relationship with God. For if there is a relationship, there is some kind of communicating understanding whereby each being is somewhat intelligent to the other. In a neutral man scenario this would be logically impossible. The only alternative is to make God himself neutral and this would cancel out his own existence. For in a neutral universe, what relationships and agreements there are between individuals is merely *de facto*, it becomes irrelevant to morals of any kind. We cannot say anything true about God which is not self-involving.¹⁹

Secondly, there is the kind of relativism which is prominent in our world of varying cultures. From our cultural vantage point we can peer into a foreign society, learn and understand their value system, but insist that it does not relate to our own, that in certain instances it clashes with what we consider to be the good. On the other hand there may be certain goods in this other society which we would want to affirm, but do not see in our own culture. A westerner visiting Iran may object to the way

¹⁸A claim of *de re* possibility is a claim concerning a particular thing. These kinds of claims are distinguished from statements of *de dicto* possibilities which refer to no particular thing when asserting the truth of some proposition, but are made on conceptual grounds. For example, it is conceptually possible that life exists on Jupiter, even though *in fact* it does not.

¹⁹This is discussed further in Chapter 7.

women are treated in the country, but would want to affirm the importance placed in family values by the Islamic tradition. As Taylor notes, some moderns view this predicament not in terms of cultural disparity, but in relation to our own specific society and its history. They discern that the modern age is progressing in terms of scientific advancement in a way that allows us to see ourselves as more self-deterministic, while at the same time they lament the loss of community or attunement to our natural surroundings that has been displaced in this process.

This second predicament, however, should not be considered a relativistic attitude towards other cultural values. This is because it assumes some sort of universalisability of goods, in so much as it sees the goods of other cultures (or atavistic societies) as goods for all persons. The point Taylor makes here is that just because these goods may not be combinable with the 'home-grown' goods of our everyday life, that does not make them relativistic. Stanley Hauerwas and David Matzko have criticised Taylor's moral theory for being one which only considers the Western view of morality.²⁰ They argue that Taylor's theory is too parochial in its application. But if Taylor's critiques of relativism are true, there is no sense of inapplicability here, as there is no such thing as the 'non-we' individual who stands apart from our cultural base completely disparate from any understanding of who we are. Even if their value systems are completely different, it is important to see that there is no 'guarantee that universally valid goods should be perfectly combinable, and certainly not in all situations.'²¹

Another way of seeing that this relativism is mistaken is by understanding the transitions which occur from one value system to the next. This is a more cosmic reflection of what happens in an individual's belief system when engaging in practical reasoning. We understand the range of goods that we hold to as somehow better than those that it comes into conflict with. We see it as gaining some purchase on past societies. It is more enlightened, closer to the truth. In this way we cannot say that these values are relative. For if we did, there would be no sense of strong evaluation involved whereby we judge certain goods to be higher than others, or

²⁰See Stanley Hauerwas and David Matzko, 'The Sources of Charles Taylor', pp.286-289.

gaining epistemological ground in terms of the best account of what is good. There is a parallel here with both how we determine the goods within our own society (as well as cross-culturally) and how we engage in moral reasoning with others in the microcosm of our individual relationships.²²

Hypergoods

The cogency of this argument against relativism, particularly of the second order, does not necessarily mean that there are moral absolutes. We have in our own experience the phenomenon of conflicting goods, so that while we may affirm, for example, the right of free expression, we may also want to affirm the right to censor some expressions particularly if they trespass on other individuals' rights of property or dignity. In our society there is a plethora of goods which are recognised. We see as worthwhile our commitment to freedom, justice, equality, the family life, the avoidance of suffering, the worship of God, etc. But some may hold one of these goods to be higher than the others, so that there is a ranking of the various goods in the individual's life. I may see job satisfaction and my work in the community as worthy pursuits, yet place above these the worship of God and my relationship with Him. This means that this good above all others orientates my life. It provides the landmark which allows me to understand where my life is heading. It is the one good which comes closest to defining my identity.

Answering the question as to whether I am approaching or retreating from this good is essential for meaning in my life. If I am close to this good I will feel a unity of spirit, a sense that my life is making sense. Conversely, if I am distanced from this good, I will tend to feel a deep despair about my predicament. For people

²¹*Sources of the Self*, p.61.

²²Engaging in moral reasoning with others in this way is more specifically spelled out by Taylor in 'Understanding and ethnocentricity' in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, and *Multiculturalism*. It is discussed in this thesis in relation to moral articulation in Christian ethics. See particularly Chapter 5 and Chapter 9.

who understand their lives in this way there is a discontinuity between this good and other goods which they affirm, it is incomparably higher than these lesser goods.

Taylor calls these kinds of goods ‘hypergoods’.²³ Not only are they incomparably higher than others, but they act as a vantage point from which to see all other goods in one’s life. We all tend to recognise such hypergoods in so much as we all have established in our lives a moral hierarchy. Modern philosophy has tended to categorise morality in such a way that each philosopher has stressed his or her own hierarchical system with their own hypergood at the pinnacle. Kant places the moral imperative in this position, Iris Murdoch, some kind of transcendent Good, Habermas less obtrusively looks to a universal norm developed in discourse ethics. Aristotle’s system, the greatest of comprehensive moral theories, ranks his goods according to the supreme good (*teleion agathon*). The difficulty here is how to determine which hypergood to affirm as ultimate.

One of the reasons that most naturalists would want to deny hypergoods is that they can come into conflict with each other. Hypergoods in our civilisation have arisen as supercessions of other previous ones. Taylor gives the example of universal rights, which now affirm such features of our society as equal opportunities for women, but which have also prescinded past hypergoods which have tended to condemn such features. We see our hypergoods as somehow better than these previous ones, as replacing a less adequate view. This is what Nietzsche called ‘a transvaluation of values.’²⁴ Furthermore, not only do our hypergoods replace other past goods, they can challenge and contest the lesser goods existing in our own society.

As Taylor points out this could be seen as grist for the reductivist mill. Williams could agree that such hypergood values were as real as any other value, but whatever truth we find in these goods would ultimately turn out to be relative to our given culture. Thus when a hypergood of another culture appears to us to be wrong or even evil, there is no way of adjudicating between the two views. We can,

²³See *Sources of the Self*, pp.62f.

²⁴See *ibid.*, pp.64-65, and Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Richard Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), sect. I.

according to this way of thinking, no more criticise the Aztec nation for their blood-sacrifices, than they can condemn our belief in universal rights. There is an epistemological malaise. We must part company and 'agree to disagree', since there is no neutral third-party who could arbitrate.²⁵

This is the first kind of relativity discussed above, which sees two cultures as 'incommensurable'. However, it has been argued that there is no actual example of this in existence. As Taylor points out, the kind of naturalism embraced here would make cultural relativity a fatality, an 'in-principle limit'. 'It conceives the "objectivity" of our valuations entirely in terms of their embedding in our different ways of life, it allows in principle no purchase from which the goods enshrined in a given way of life can be shown as wrong or inadequate.'²⁶ The critical supercession of such hypergoods involves something very dissimilar to this. When we hold to a certain hypergood, say of the belief in universal rights, we do not consider this to be a mere expression of our way of life. We consider it to be that which is true and believable. By their very nature, moral claims reach beyond cultural boundaries. We *do* react to the Aztec sacrifices with repulsion and condemnation. It is only at a reflective distance that we can see this as an expression of their culture and take an interest in it in that way. By their make-up hypergoods resist the 'live and let live' mentality which Williams and other reductivists would want to affirm.²⁷

The naturalists have a great difficulty in the way these hypergoods challenge and displace each other with no neutrally moral agent refereeing the situation, even within the monocultural context. Conversely, in the Christian tradition a relationship with God involves sharing His love with the world, and it 'tints' our entire moral

²⁵In the realm of the social sciences Taylor sees this view leading to what he calls 'the incorrigibility thesis', which essentially argues that 'in requiring that we explain each culture or society in its own terms, it [the incorrigibility thesis] rules out an account which shows them up as wrong, confused or deluded. Each culture on this view is incorrigible,' ('Understanding and ethnocentricity', in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, p.123). He argues that this is a 'false ally' to his own *verstehen* view of understanding other cultures.

²⁶*Sources of the Self*, p.67.

²⁷Ironically, this could be considered a hypergood that Williams holds against any culture-relative value system. For a reductivist in the sociological realm that Taylor argues with see Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science* (New York: Humanities Press, 1958), and for a persuasive argument for 'the incorrigibility thesis' see Winch's 'Understanding a primitive society', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1, 1964, pp.307-324.

outlook so that we view our relationship with others and our life goals differently. In most cases, many of our goods are challenged by this new hypergood, but there is no consensus as to which should be replaced. Who is to say which goods are right, especially in a pluralist modern world which affirms the many goods of ordinary life? The Christian would want to say 'God is the arbitrator', but most moderns would not be happy with this answer unless we could somehow establish God as a neutral agent. The difficulty with this of course is that we would no longer be relating to God as we understand Him, i.e., the source of all goodness.²⁸

The question is can these hypergoods be saved as objective, cross-cultural claims, in the way Taylor would want to picture them? This does not mean to question whether we can prove that they are all true, for many of them on closer inspection could be seen as illusory. What is meant is can any of them be seen to be valid? On the other hand, it is just as important to note that when we do determine *some* of these hypergoods to be false, this does not set up any a priori argument against the objective existence of *all* such hypergoods. We can no more assert this than we can make any universal claim from a particular induction *tout court*.

The way Taylor sets about this challenge is to redirect our attention back to the BA principle.²⁹ To see the world of ethics as the reductivist would, through the eyes of a scientific examiner, presupposes that our moral values ought to follow the rules of physics. As mentioned above Platonism and post-17th century naturalism have conspired to bring about this premise which has remained largely unchallenged in modern epistemology. This, however, begs the question. For how are we to know that we can use these scientific principles to examine human beings until we can actually explain how these beings live their lives by these principles? We cannot explain this by using these principles, since we must rely on what gives us the best account at a certain point of time, rather than assuming that science or any other discipline can a priori explain human behaviour. As was argued above, this means that if certain terms such as 'dignity' or 'freedom' are essential for us in order to

²⁸It should also be clear that even within the Church the 'Good' of God has the potential for endless interpretation.

²⁹See p.43.



make sense of our lives, they cannot be extracted from the formula of explanation. 'How else to determine what is real or objective, or part of the furniture of things, than by seeing what properties or entities or features our best account of things has to invoke?'³⁰

This also applies to the realm of hypergoods. If naturalism and the Platonic precedent of Ideas should not frighten us away from using such thick virtue terms, it should also not bully us into denying the existence of hypergoods if they turn out to be ineliminable in terms of describing the domain of human affairs. These hypergoods tend to be more difficult to adhere to in modern society for several reasons. The first, already discussed, is that they often challenge and displace one another. Who is to say that the protagonists of the 'higher' morality are correct in affirming their hypergoods against other 'ordinary' life goods? The affirmation of everyday life that we see in modern society over and against either citizen participation (*phronesis*) or monastic contemplation (*theoria*) has led many to reject the very religious source responsible for us seeing such goods as the family life or marriage as meaningful. This is a detail that Taylor develops very carefully in part III of *Sources of the Self*.

Nietzsche, of course, took this a step further and tried to break out of the entire 'moral' order as set up by Christianity. The affirmation of freedom for him meant that we develop our own values so that for the superior man, like the character of Rupert in Hitchcock's *Rope*, crimes such as murder are permissible. Nietzsche also claimed that Science destroys faith. In so far as science seeks reality, it cancels out religious dogmas. But this is exactly the misconception that Taylor is addressing when he argues that morality and the domain of human affairs should not necessarily come under the authority of scientific, 'objective' observation. Furthermore, simply by seeing, either from the critique of those like Nietzsche or the benefit of historical reflection, that some of the hypergoods once affirmed are now recognised as disreputable, does not necessarily mean that hypergoods in general have no part to play in giving the best account of our moral situation. Indeed, they might be

³⁰*Sources of the Self*, p.68.

justifiably eliminable, but in order to find this out we must look and see what makes the best sense according to the BA principle.

Practical Reasoning or Practically Moral Reasoning?

Taylor, however, sees an objection here. It is not merely a matter of looking, but of arguing, establishing through reason, that something is true, that one view is better than another. Here we are once again faced with the question ‘what does it mean to give a *reason* for a moral position?’.³¹ When we are given two individuals A and B with conflicting hypergoods, it is not clear how A goes about convincing B that his hypergood is superior. And if he cannot do this, it is impossible to see how A could even convince himself. Or are these beliefs mere opinions, ‘sub-rational hunches and feelings’, as the naturalist has been asserting all along?

Naturalist epistemology has prejudiced our thinking in this respect by focusing on the natural science model whereby we neutralise our anthropocentric approach to knowledge thus disregarding moral reactions and intuitions. It assumes that we ought to be able to convince another person who shares *none* of our inclinations, and that if we cannot, then moral reasoning is of no avail. Taylor disputes the perennial claims of this foundationalist approach: ‘... if our moral ontology springs from the best account of the human domain we can arrive at, and if this account must be in anthropocentric terms, terms which relate to the meanings things have for us, then the demand to start outside of all such meanings, not to rely on our moral intuitions or on what we find morally moving, is in fact a proposal to change the subject.’³²

The following syllogism puts the argument more succinctly:

1. If something is the best account then it must relate to *all* the meanings things have for us.
2. One of the ways things have meaning for us is through moral intuition.

³¹See p.38.

³²*Sources of the Self*, p.72. See also Donald Davidson, ‘Mental Events’ in *Essays on Action and Events*, p.216.

3. A de-anthropocentric examination does not relate to moral intuitions.
4. Therefore a de-anthropocentric examination is not the best account.³³

If practical reasoning does not proceed through this scientific method, how then do we reason?³⁴ Modern concepts of practical reason are held captive by the primacy of the epistemological: we determine what something *is* by how it is *known*. Coupled with this is the foundationalist method of knowledge which has become canon law in modern epistemology. By this model our knowledge claims are to be checked by deconstructing them to their basic elements, their ultimate foundations, and this is to be distinct from the inferences which build from these foundations towards our original unreflecting beliefs. This can often be confused with reason itself. This method of reasoning can only come about through the type of practice Taylor calls *apodictic* reasoning.³⁵ This reasoning method starts from no assumptions and works through a logical progression to prove a point of view correct. In such a system we are faced with an opposing moral stance which is clear and whose foundations are well articulated and share no common ground with our own. In arbitrating between two such views people work with 'criteria' so that the position will have certain inbuilt conditions. Criteria usually entail externally defined standards by which to measure each view, but who can act as the source and authority of such criteria? The whole purpose of the apodictic mode of reasoning is to distance ourselves from any parochial vantage point. But in this attempt to negate such prejudices it sets itself a challenge which cannot be met.

The assumption is that we ought to be able to convince someone from a standing start who does not share *any* of our basic moral intuitions. We should be

³³Seeing this with predicate logic terms may help to clarify the validity of this argument:

B = Best Account

P = all the meanings things have for us

Q = moral intuition

R = deanthropocentric examination

'≠' means 'not equal'.

We can first assert that in order for B to be true it must relate to P. Following on from this all Q's are part of P and so for B to be true it must relate to Q. R does not relate to Q and therefore it does not satisfy the particular predicate of relating to P. Therefore, R ≠ B.

³⁴Taylor discusses this problem in great depth in 'Explanation and Practical Reasoning', in *Philosophical Arguments*.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p.36.

able to present them with facts or principles which they cannot but accept, and which are sufficient to disprove their position. This model, however, falls into the rift between fact and value, the very same hazard that Mill stumbled into when he attempted to assert that just because we *do* desire something, we *ought* to.³⁶ With two clearly defined opposing views it is difficult to see where to begin.

Furthermore, even if two individuals do reach an agreement, this does not really say anything about the final position's moral value. It is just a 'happy fact' that they agree. In other words their agreement is based on weak rather than strong evaluations.³⁷ Nothing in this resolution has fixed onto the value of the outcome. Just because there is consensus on the issue of killing people it does not mean that the position is correct, there is no hypergood involved. The position must be asserted as a strong evaluation in order for it to have moral weight. In the naturalist world where the line between strong and weak evaluations is fudged, this will never occur. For 'in a neutral universe what agreement there is between attitudes seems merely a brute fact, irrelevant to morals, and disagreement seems utterly inarbitrable by reason, bridgeable only by propaganda, arm-twisting, or emotional manipulation.'³⁸

Taylor thinks that this has been one of the leading contributors to moral scepticism in modernity. If individuals see moral reasoning in an apodictic fashion they will tend to despair, for morality then becomes a matter of one's own individual preferences, feelings, and opinions. Reason is powerless, and if reason is powerless, we cannot stop people from believing *anything*. How does one argue against someone within this model who happens to think that it is permissible to kill innocent people? This is a scepticism that leads to subjectivism—the view that we see things as right or valuable because we feel predisposed to them.

³⁶See J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism, On Liberty and Considerations on Representative Government*, ed. H. B. Acton (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1972) p.36.

³⁷See Chapter 1, pp.2ff.

³⁸See 'Explanation and Practical Reason', in *Philosophical Arguments*, pp.39-40.

Ad Hominem Reasoning

There have been several attempts to combat the sceptics who point out the weakness of this model of reasoning, but the real question is do we need to adhere to this model at all? Taylor suggests that its role as prototype should be challenged. To think of a reason does not necessarily entail thinking in terms of apodictic reasoning.

There is another form of reasoning which challenges this naturalist, objective perception. This is reasoning from a vantage point, what Taylor calls *ad hominem* reasoning.³⁹ Most moral arguments begin from the premise that my opponent shares some of my basic assumptions, so that the task is not to disprove some radically opposed foundational assertion such as killing innocent people is permissible. The object rather is to untangle some moral confusion by showing the interlocutor that moving from X to Y constitutes an epistemic gain: it resolves a conflict in position X, or it acknowledges the importance of some factor which X did not include, etc. In this way changing someone's moral view always entails increasing his own self-understanding.

The *ad hominem* form of argument is vindicated by the BA principle in so much as it is an attempt to do justice to human thought, action, and feelings by focusing on the actual practices of moral deliberation, debate, and understanding. Underlying these is the perennial foundation of strong evaluations. Inescapable commitments or strong evaluations are the very essence of the *ad hominem* way of reasoning. They are those parts of ourselves which make up our moral horizon, which are ineliminable in terms of our personal identity. These are the assumptions that we build upon in moral reasoning. By definition the *ad hominem* form of reasoning begins from the vantage point of the interlocutor, what she or he is already committed to.

This method has been strongly criticised, not only for its inability to live up to the canonised form of foundationalist epistemology, but moral critics have argued that such a view foils all attempts to make a radical moral shift in one's position. The

³⁹See *Ibid.*, p.36.

foundationalist model of reasoning is meant to break free from the parochialisms of individual view points. The radical moral critic would assert that any *ad hominem* attempt at moral reasoning holds onto these parochialisms, thereby suppressing any moral shift. He would argue that there must be some criteria outside of the individual which will allow him to make such moral shifts.⁴⁰

These criteria are difficult to establish. Even in the realm of scientific explanation the assumption that rational arbitration of differences requires criteria has become problematic. Philosophers such as Thomas Kuhn have demonstrated the lack of universal working criteria in the various scientific fields.⁴¹ Nevertheless, Alasdair MacIntyre has persuasively argued that we can see advancement in scientific terms without criteria.⁴² The apodictic method in scientific reasoning is just as weak as it is in ethics. What is needed is a readjustment of our metatheory regarding the reasoning process. MacIntyre's solution, which Taylor applies to moral reasoning, is to understand not the 'absolute' criteria of any one theory, but the *passage* from one position to another as representing a gain. 'We can give a convincing narrative account of the passage from the first to the second as an advance in knowledge, a step from a less good to a better understanding of the phenomena in question.'⁴³ There exists an ameliorating situation whereby the transition from X to Y is asymmetrical. A transition from Y to X would not constitute the same epistemic gain. Taylor argues that we can arbitrate between moral positions by portraying *transitions* as gains or losses, even when no criteria—*qua* external arbitrating factors—exist.

We can do this in a number of ways moving from position X to position Y:

'What may convince us that a given transition from X to Y is a gain is not only or even so much how X and Y deal with the facts, but how they deal with each other. It may be that from the standpoint of Y, not just the phenomena in dispute, but also the history of X and its

⁴⁰Taylor argues against this kind of meta-ethical polemic in his essay 'Justice after Virtue', in *After MacIntyre: critical perspectives on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, eds. John Horton and Susan Mendus (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).

⁴¹See Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

⁴²See Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science'.

⁴³See 'Explanation and Practical Reason', p.42

particular pattern of anomalies, difficulties, makeshifts, and breakdowns can be greatly illuminated. In adopting Y, we make better sense not just of the world, but of our history of trying to explain the world, part of which has been played out in terms of X.⁴⁴

So by adopting Y we not only get a better picture of the world, but also of X. Furthermore, Y may uncover a certain moral development which X had neglected to take into consideration. So for example, I may want to argue for my present moral outlook over and against a more patriarchal society by showing that we both may hold to the dignity of humans, but the patriarchal view does not deal with the development of women's rights. I can show the interlocutor here that given what he already accepts, he cannot help but attribute to the policy of equal rights for women the significance I am arguing for.

Reasoning through Transitions

In these two forms of argument the loser had to acknowledge some considerations which was a gain on his system. In this sense there did exist a criterion of sorts, *viz.* the recognition of some error-reducing gain. But what about circumstances which do not permit of such criteria? A situation can be conceived whereby the transition from X to Y is not seen as a gain by virtue of it being the only way of making sense of the considerations. Rather it is shown to be a gain directly, as identified as overcoming an error. This reverses the foundationalist approach. Instead of concluding that Y is a gain over X because of the superior performance of Y, we would be confident of the superior performance of Y because we know that Y is a gain over X. This is the 'criterionless' argument of MacIntyre which Taylor applies to moral theory.

Taylor argues that analogues of this can be seen in everyday life. If I open my front door and I think I see a snake curled up on the mat at my feet, I may suddenly jump back, but then come to realise that it is not a snake at all, but a coil of rope. The

⁴⁴Ibid., p.43.

act of coming to realise that what is in front of me is not a snake, but a piece of rope is one whereby my perception is improved by virtue of the transition being an error-reducing transition. Identifying the object as a harmless coil of rope instead of a dangerous snake is a better viewpoint by the mere fact that I have gone through an ameliorating transition. In other words I do not come to the superior epistemological position of ‘this is a coil of rope’, by stepping outside the situation and attempting to ground this epistemological gain in some underlying indisputable index of knowledge before I will believe it. There are no such criteria involved. I do not take a survey or do a scientific experiment to determine whether or not what is in front of me really is a snake. ‘It is my direct sense of the transition as an error-reducing one which grounds my confidence that my perceptual performance will improve.’⁴⁵

In the same way Taylor argues that one does not need to go outside one’s own experience in order to engage in moral reasoning. I do not need to step back and make a calculation, apart from any beliefs that I have, in order to come to the right answer. There are no criteria involved whereby I decide on the basis of these indisputable foundations that B is a better thing to do than A. By going from A to B it just *is* the case that B shows up an error-reducing move, that some contradiction is ironed out, or that I get a better epistemological take on the issue. In this way moral reasoning should be considered as akin to our perception. Just as seeing something strange causes us to take a closer look—attending to it and scrutinising more closely—so too our moral reasoning should be a kind of engaged exploration. In dialogue this means getting others to ‘an interpretation of themselves which identifies these confused feelings as confused and which thus, if accepted, will bring about the self-justifying transition.’⁴⁶ The inverse of this can also be true where our interlocutors get us to recognise our own confusions and inconsistencies.

⁴⁵Ibid., p.52.

⁴⁶Ibid., p.53. NB: Taylor can apply this theory of perception to moral reasoning because of the epistemological assumptions undergirding both. In moving from an inferior to a superior moral position an epistemological gain is involved. It is getting a better grip on reality that is analogous to clearing away a perceived illusion. For a more in-depth discussion on Taylor’s epistemology see Chapter 4.

Taylor thinks that this is the most common form of practical reasoning in our lives, and it is here that the *ad hominem* mode of argument is at its most intense and its most fruitful. Whenever we propose to an interlocutor transitions which are in and of themselves error-reducing moves—freeing a contradiction, clearing up a confusion, embracing a consideration, which the interlocutor cannot help but identify as significant—any appeal to criteria such as a basic reason or some external consideration is quite beside the point. The transition is justified by the very nature of the move which effects it.

Practical reasoning in this way is reasoning in *transition*. The narrative which involves the history of X and the history of Y is essential to understanding the ultimate outcome of the argument. While the epistemological tradition has wanted to condemn such transitional arguments, the fact cannot be avoided that my perspective is defined by my moral intuitions or strong evaluations, and to abstract from this vantage point would mean I would no longer be able to make any sense of moral arguments. One can only be convinced to change one's moral view by changing the reading of one's moral experience, and particularly one's reading of one's life story, the *narrative* of one's moral transitions. Hypergoods evolve in a similar way. We understand their value through reasoning, and this reasoning is a matter of transition from one hypergood to another. In this way the conviction that a hypergood carries relies to a great extent upon its origin. As Taylor describes it: 'Our acceptance of any hypergood is connected in a complex way with our being *moved* by it.'⁴⁷

Qualitative Distinctions in Moral Reasoning

The discussion here has come full circle in the investigation of the role qualitative distinctions play in our moral thinking. Taylor first suggests that these kinds of discriminations give us reasons for our moral beliefs and then goes on to discuss the intricacies of this assertion. Qualitative distinctions as reasons do not

⁴⁷*Sources of the Self*, p.73.

mean external considerations or criteria as in the apodictic form of practical reasoning. They are not the kind of reasons called upon by naturalists to convince someone who was completely unmoved by a certain vision of the good that he ought to adopt it.

Nor are they the kind of reasons which would attempt to show that a certain act is enjoined to some crucial property. An example of this reasoning might be arguing against dumping toxic waste into the ocean on the grounds that it is detrimental to human existence. The problem with this argument is that when dumping toxic waste no longer affects human welfare, it *ipso facto* ceases to be a moral issue. These ‘basic reasons’ occur in situations where we would say you ought to do A, because $A = B$, and you are morally committed to B. This may seem quite straightforward and unproblematic, yet in certain circumstances where B is not a moral commitment or when A no longer equals B, we are no longer *obligated* to do A. It ceases to be a good.⁴⁸

Qualitative distinctions as definitions of the good are reasons in an entirely different way. They do not depend upon any external criteria or basic reason, as the most fruitful examples of the *ad hominem* mode of reasoning demonstrate. Rather qualitative distinctions based on strong evaluations are by their very nature what we hold to be good. They offer reasons in the sense that articulating them means articulating what underlies our ethical choices, leanings, intuitions. In this way moral reasons pinpoint exactly that which I have only a dim grasp of when I say X is wrong or Y is right, or Z is worth preserving.

So, as Taylor has been formulating this argument, qualitative distinctions have two important functions in our ethical life. First ‘prearticulately’ they ground our moral intuitions, orientate our sense of what is valuable and meaningful in our lives. Secondly, articulating these distinctions means setting out the moral point of our actions and feelings. ‘They have this place both in the broader domain of goods that we pursue across the whole range of our lives, as well as the more special

⁴⁸This point is made in relation to the command of God as a ‘basic reason’ in Chapter 7.

domain of hypergoods, which claim a status of incomparably greater importance and urgency in our lives.⁴⁹

The idea of articulation, from moving from what is implicit to what is explicit in moral reasoning, is something that Taylor is unique in stressing as a modern philosopher. It finds a parallel in the moral psychology of both Plato and Aristotle, particularly as these philosophers understand the concept of *logos*. Plato interprets the term *logistikos* not simply as a feature of our thinking, but as that in us which is capable of grasping the Ideas in general, and grasping the way in which these Ideas all fit together. The *logos* in us is what enables us to *speak* and give account of things surrounding us. The metaphysical and ontological connotations of this way of thinking for Plato are that giving an account of something in this way is tantamount to articulating it correctly, of revealing what reality actually looks like (*Republic*, 534B). In order to be rational we have to give accounts in this way. The Greek is *λογον διδομαι*, to give a *logon* of something. So according to Plato it is a characteristic of human beings that we be rational in a way as to give (through speech) this *logos*.

Alternatively Taylor's idea of articulation can be seen as resembling Aristotle's view of language. In the *Politics* Aristotle argues that Nature does nothing without purpose, and humans are distinct as animals possessing *logon* (1253A10ff.). Lower animals can only distinguish pleasure and pain, whereas humans see right and wrong, good and bad. This power of distinction is thought by Aristotle just to be their possessing of *logos*. Only beings that can bring these distinctions out through *speech* can have the *worthwhile* or *not worthwhile* in their world.

Alongside this is the idea that the operative capacity of our discernment is not just as individuals, but that speech exists between *us*—the *koinonia* or community. Aristotle relates speech in terms of the fullness of human life. It is not monological reflection, but the medium of interchange between people. If it did not have this primary site of exchange, none of us could get to the point where it had a reflective, monological feature whereby we go off on our own and think in solitude. Nature

⁴⁹*Sources of the Self*, p.78.

gave humans *logos* because that is the means by which they discern good and bad, advantageous, harmful, etc. Therefore, the primary locus of this discernment is *dialogical*, and so we must have *koinonia*: the family (*oikia*) and the civic community (*polis*). Thus there is an inextricable link for Aristotle between being speech animals and being political animals. Speech discerns the good, and the locus of speech is between two individuals, so we need this dialogical relationship, and the primary locus of this is the *polis*.

Articulating with moral interlocutors for Taylor has similar features: our interchange should be a gregariousness marked by discourse and deliberation of the good and the bad. In the same way that Aristotle locates the speech act between individuals so too Taylor sees moral reasoning as fundamentally dialogical. This free intercourse is to be pursued against a mode of life where we take orders from Big Brother or a dictatorial regime. Within this exchange the implicit is vocalised and our moral frameworks are given form through the dynamics of language. The importance that Taylor places on this idea of articulating our moral frameworks and qualitative distinctions is further considered in the final chapter of this section.

CHAPTER THREE



Cramped Moral Views and the Point of Articulation

Articulation and Constitutive Goods

If articulating these distinctions means setting out the moral point of our actions and feelings, then we can ask what is the use of such an articulation. Why is it important for Taylor that we get clear about our moral sources? Perhaps this seems like a truism to some, yet others have felt a need for silence in the matter. Wittgenstein, for example, avoids pinning down the good in such a way.

One obvious answer would be to point to the expressive nature of language. In some sense articulating the good behind moral intuitions entails creating that good in so far as this expression is a constitutional part of what that good is eventually identified as. In other words various goods are only identified in some form of language. Belief in God, for example, is only a possibility because He has been talked about and talked to in prayer.

Of course language here is meant as a very broadly defined term not to be restricted to vocal gestures, utterances, words, symbols, or specific syntaxes. Art can be a powerful language which communicates some form of the good. Thus the Early Church policy championed by Gregory the Great set about formulating a language for the illiterate so that they could see the good of God and His history with His people articulated through the visual images of mosaics, frescoes and sculpture.

Taylor questions whether such a broad definition of language can help us understand the benefit of the equally broad definition of articulation, and whether there is really any need to focus on the narrower, more concise definition of language as speech. Must we try and *say* what the underlying sense of the good is? From the discussion at the end of the last chapter it is clear that Plato and Aristotle would consider speech essential simply because it is a feature that is inescapably linked to the human agent *qua* rational being. Because we are *logov* possessing animals it is to our own good to articulate reason in such a way. We must give an account through speech, and, as Aristotle argues, the speech situation is not monological, it is necessarily grounded in the articulation between moral agents.

As a Christian Taylor sees this ontological notion of language taking purchase from the relationship between man and God. As a philosopher, however, he wants to investigate more particular reasons for articulating the good. What specific benefits can come about through this articulation other than any general sense of meaning and direction?

One of the most important answers to this question for Taylor is that articulating the good empowers us to *do* the good. It brings us closer to the good, and by doing so articulation can act as a catalyst towards accomplishing good. In order to argue for this advantage of articulation Taylor makes an important distinction between certain goods which is fundamental to understanding the transcendent nature of his moral theory.

Up until this point Taylor has been speaking of the good in a general sense to mean that which we consider valuable or meaningful for us. Some of these goods have a special status so that they are incomparably higher than others, and these are what he has called 'hypergoods'. In some of these distinctions, however, the term seems to merit the attribution of value in a fuller sense. For example Plato's theory of Ideas, particularly in the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*, sees a higher and a lower order of things which depends upon the hegemony between reason and desire. Reason in this theory, however, has an authentic ontological status. Because it is understood substantively rather than procedurally, to be rational is to have a vision of the order

of reason and to love this order. The principle underlying the order is the Idea of the Good. This Idea is such that to grasp the good is a good itself, and to see it is to be moved by it and to understand it as worthy of love.¹ The term ‘*εἶδος*’ metaphorically underlies the deeper, general feature that various things in the world are the way they are because they are striving to realise this standard.²

Thus the difference in certain actions must be explained in terms of a cosmic order of things, an external reality. This way of speaking of the good introduces a much fuller concept into Taylor’s moral argument. What this entails is the dependency of our actions as moral agents on the Idea of the Good, or something substantively similar to this. The kind of good that Taylor is describing, because of its rich ontological status, *substantiates* the lower goods in our lives. For obvious reasons Taylor calls these kinds of goods ‘constitutive goods’. ‘Their relation to this [good] is what makes certain of our actions or aspirations good; it is what constitutes the goodness of these actions or motives.’³ Furthermore, not only do constitutive goods define the goods in our lives, but the love of such goods empower us to do good. As such they are important moral sources for Taylor:

‘The constitutive good does more than just define the content of the moral theory. Love of it is what empowers us to be good. And hence also loving it is part of what it is to be a good human being. This is now part of the content of the moral theory as well, which includes injunctions not only to act in certain ways and to exhibit certain moral qualities but also to love what is good.’⁴

This strong ontological claim is extremely controversial. Up until this point Taylor was restricting his theory to those ‘life goods’ which are qualitative distinctions between certain actions and feelings (or modes of life). The goods that these define are facets or components of the good life. Here, however, Taylor

¹See *Republic*, Bk.VII.

²See Plato’s *Phaedo*, trans. R. Hackforth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) 75A.

³*Sources of the Self*, p.92.

⁴*Ibid.*, p.93. Taylor points out that the love for the good in this way cannot be considered a contingent aid to doing the good. It cannot be viewed in strictly instrumental terms, since doing good actions always includes the dimension of motive. ‘To love the constitutive good (however conceived) is to be strongly motivated in just that way which is defined as part of doing the good (on that conception). That is why being good involves *loving* something and not just *doing* something.’ (*Ibid.*, p.534).

introduces the concept of transcendent reality. One sees life goods as part of a cosmic measuring system. These refer to some feature of the way things *are* in something resembling a correspondence theory of truth.⁵ In the realm of Christianity one can see a clear application of this idea. The appeal of neo-Platonism to the early Church Fathers seems natural if one understands God as a constitutive good both defining what lesser goods are by virtue of their position to Him, and empowering us to do the good through our love for Him.

The Obligationist Response

This of course is far beyond the boundaries of offering basic reasons for moral decisions and intuitions. Most modern moral theories have no place for qualitative distinctions, let alone a moral realism of constitutive goods. They can make no sense of a place for the incomparably higher at all in our lives. Their philosophical position has been motivated by naturalism, partly in the epistemological assumptions that allow the natural sciences to act as a paradigm for explaining the domain of human experience. There has been another way that naturalist influences have brought modern moral philosophy to a point where there is no longer any concept of qualitative distinctions, and that is in promoting the focus of *action* rather than *being* in ethics. As mentioned in chapter one, the moral theories of our day tend to picture ethics as certain obligations. Such theories run into difficulties when they attempt to involve qualitative distinctions.

Most of the theories that are functioning in this way are some form of utilitarianism or (as in the case of Habermas) a legacy of Kant's moral framework. Utilitarianism is perhaps the most striking case because while it does not admit to any qualitative distinctions, it does recognise the good of 'happiness'. This good does

⁵The term 'correspondence theory' often sets off alarm bells in the minds of philosophers since they equate it with 'raving Platonism'. Taylor, however, does not want to be satisfied with the categories 'realism' and 'anti-realism' in his metaphysics and tries to invoke qualities of both in his moral theory (see his reply to Rorty in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, pp.219-222). Yet clearly he is attempting to establish an ontologically grounded moral framework similar to Plato's or Augustine's.

not claim any incomparably higher status, however, as there is no higher or lower in a utilitarian system, only desire. But it is quite clear from most of these theories that they do unconscionably rank certain goods, such as rationality or benevolence as higher than others, even if these goods are not articulated as having such a status.⁶

Taylor points to several reasons why modern theories of utilitarianism seem to contradict themselves in this way. Part of the reason lies in the naturalist temperament. Not only does this effect morality by setting a scientific explanation whereby higher goods do not seem to make any sense, but there is also the more pervasive problem of the narrow focus of morality spotlighting obligations. A deontic emphasis on *action*, what one *ought* to do, means that one excludes not only what it is good to *be*, but also what it is good to *love*. Thus in this conception there is no room for notions of the good life or the good as the object of our allegiance. These two ways that the good is able to play a role in our moral life are discounted since they fall outside the boundaries of what one is obliged to act upon. Strictly speaking the good life and loving the good lie within the realm of supererogation.

Utilitarianism and Kantian theories are strictly concerned with determining what our obligations are in certain situations. Coming to formulate these obligations usually means having recourse to a set of criteria to judge whether or not a certain action will promote the most happiness, or be truest to the idea of treating other people's prescriptions as one's own, etc. The difference between these theories and what Taylor wants to defend is that obligationists are in the business of giving 'basic reasons' for certain actions. Taylor, on the other hand, gives qualitative distinctions as reasons in an entirely different sense of the word. His reasons are the underlying meaning of his moral reactions which make sense of the good life. Not only do obligationists have no need for such reasons, but there is, as we have seen, a tendency to deny any legitimate place for them. Most of them cannot understand qualitative distinctions as real entities, and thus reduce them to the status of projections.⁷

⁶See J. J. C. Smart and B. Williams, *Utilitarianism For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

⁷See 'The Problem of Projectionism', in Chapter 2.

Taylor points out several motives for this exclusion including the sway of naturalism. He argues that articulating our qualitative distinctions means setting out the point of our moral beliefs, but there can be cases where we know that a certain act is forbidden, and yet do not really understand the reason behind it. For example, a child might be told not to stick his tongue out at the stranger on the bus, but only understand later, after he had matured, that it was because he was demonstrating a lack of respect for the other person, which was not right. The distinction here between actions and reasons is a distinction that naturalism strives to avoid. For as they are attempting to explain the human condition in scientific terms, i.e., in terms which extrapolate us from the anthropocentric point of view to a more 'absolute' vantage point, they describe our affairs solely as external stipulations, focusing on action. This has helped to establish obligation-centred theories of morality as prominent in our culture.⁸

Alongside this lie several *moral* motives for emphasising actions over qualitative distinctions. One reason for this, mentioned above, is the eclipsing of higher goods by the affirmation of everyday life in society. The modern can see the rejection of higher goods such as citizen participation or moral meditation as a liberation from a stifling archaic system of order. They are then free to embrace 'lesser' goods such as the family or production at work.

Furthermore, because of the nature of morality, a person may feel condemned by a certain good, particularly if it is one that he cannot possibly live up to. Understanding Christianity without the concept of Grace is the prime example of such a good in Christian ethics. In such cases, breaking the allegiance of such a good can seem like a liberating experience. The real question, however, is whether such a break is the only solution. Understanding the good in another light may make all the difference. Living up to the standards set by God in Christianity will seem a hopeless task if God's grace and love were not a part of this moral system.

⁸See, for example, Mary Warnock's discussion of this in *Ethics since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960).

Alongside the affirmation of ordinary life, the modern concept of freedom tends to promote an obligationist theory of morality. Ancient moral theories, such as Plato's Forms or Aristotle's function of man, set up a teleological ideal which was outside of the individual. There was some notion of reality which man had to live up to in order to be moral. The Enlightenment challenged such a concept with the idea of modern freedom being the freedom of the subject to self-determination. External authorities such as God or Ideal Forms became incompatible with the self-determining individual.

Ironically, this was first conceived in theological terms through medieval nominalism. In an attempt to save the sovereignty of God nominalists refuted any idea of an external order of nature which would determine good and bad. This eventually led to a mechanistic interpretation of reality, seeing the universe in terms of cause and effect, void of any intrinsic purpose.⁹ This 'theological decisionism' already had a role to play in formulating early utilitarian thought, such as Hobbes' political atomism, which argued that 'whatsoever is the object of a man's appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calleth good.'¹⁰ Freedom was emphasised in mature utilitarianism as a liberation from an external order of paternalism. So qualitative distinctions are discredited as morally suspicious, since they exist as external orders which utilitarians see as an infringement upon the modern freedom of self-determinism.¹¹

Although Kant wanted to take a stance against the utilitarian concept of identifying duty with desire for happiness, he, nevertheless, shares the emphasis on freeing oneself from nature. The moral law emanates from our will, and we are filled with awe (*Achtung*) by this law because of its author, the rational agent. Nothing in the universe has an equal status. We as rational creatures demand dignity by our very reason. So, moral obligation owes nothing to any external nature for Kant. Taylor argues, however, that like utilitarianism, Kant's theory attempts to reject something that he cannot work without. For although both of these philosophies claim to deny

⁹See Robert Lenoble, *Mersenne et la naissance du mécanisme* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1943).

¹⁰Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. M. Oakeshott (Oxford: Blackwell's, 1946) chp.6, p.32.

¹¹See *Sources of the Self*, Chapter 16.

qualitative distinctions, they are still assuming some kind of moral hierarchy. In the case of utilitarianism it is the goods of happiness and benevolence above others. In Kant's theory it is the dignity of the rational agent.¹²

A common slogan used by modern Kantians, such as John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*, is the principle of the priority of the *right* over the *good*.¹³ Originally, as a counter-attack to utilitarianism, this was merely meant to assert that morality could not be seen strictly in terms of outcomes, but must in some way be deontic. This, of course, can be applied not only against the good of desire-fulfilment, but any good, as Rawls tries to do. His theory is an attempt to establish a notion of justice based on a 'thin' description of the good. He manages to establish such a theory, but can only justify his concepts of the good as ones which coincide with our intuitions. As Taylor notes, if we were to start spelling out these intuitions we would soon be in the business of articulating our qualitative distinctions which underlie these moral reactions and would have to start using 'thick' descriptions of moral language.¹⁴

This modern conception of freedom, combined with the metaphysical and epistemological preconceptions of naturalism, highlight the overall drive behind a narrow focus of morality whereby we see it in terms of obligations and basic reasons. Alongside these motivations is another feature of the Enlightenment, namely practical benevolence. This was particularly emphasised by Francis Bacon, who felt that scientific advancement was to function as a humanitarian aid to relieving the suffering of mankind.¹⁵ We are urged therefore through science to the action of charity. Modern society has taken up Bacon's ideal and set about to improve the human condition by overcoming poverty, famine, world hunger, disease, and general suffering. The sentiment is that 'we should strive to leave the world a more prosperous place than we found it.'¹⁶

¹²See Taylor's 'Kant's Theory of Freedom', in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*.

¹³See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) chp.7, sect.60.

¹⁴See Taylor's 'The Nature and Scope of Distributive Justice' in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, and Michael Sandel's critique of Rawls in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*.

¹⁵See Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum Scientiarum*, I. 73; translated from *Francis Bacon: A Selection of His Works*, ed. Sidney Warhaft (London: Macmillan, 1965).

¹⁶*Sources of the Self*, p.85.

Considering such an emphasis it is not difficult to see how most would side with a morality which tended towards action. What is preferred is a system that will get things done, not one which will lead us into some self-absorbed state of concerns about contemplating the good. An individual could be seen as justified in turning from such a metaphysical concept of the good to a more Kantian line simply because he saw too much suffering in the world and needed to feel as if he were actively engaging with an attempt to relieve this. Arguably, this kind of reasoning is a powerful engine in the development of modern Christian ethics which has aligned itself more with the 'practical ethics' involved in sociology rather than the moral theory of philosophy.¹⁷

Procedural Ethics

The kinds of motivations that led people to concentrate on obligations and deontological features when considering a moral position bring together the Kantians and the utilitarians under the common banner of 'procedural' ethics. Procedural is distinguished from substantive by Taylor in so much as these ethics tend to focus not so much on the end product as how one arrives there. This distinction can be clarified if we take the example of a moral theory such as Plato's. In such a framework practical reason was understood substantively, as coinciding with a correspondence theory of truth. There existed some goal, some substantive, external reality which was to be grasped. Constitutive Goods are such a reality. They are understood substantively both by having an independent ontological status, and by determining the quality of the goods in our lives. Once we deny ourselves such a vision of the good to seek after, however, we are faced with a procedural conception of morality. We no longer have a *teleion agathon* to follow. Clearly such a procedural approach is bound up with the modern concept of freedom. In as much as we wish to affirm our self-determination by denying external boundaries and limits on our morality, we are

¹⁷This is discussed further in Part III.

faced with concentrating on the procedural. Taylor regards this idea of freedom as the strongest motive for the massive shift in moral philosophy from the substantive to the procedural.

There are several problems that Taylor argues leave ‘perplexing gaps’ in any procedural attempt to systematise a working theory of ethics. First, because of the focus on *action* and *obligation*, a procedural ethic cannot capture the background understanding of any moral position. It fails to give a reason in the way a qualitative distinction professes to do concerning what lies behind our initial moral reactions. We have a sense in our intuitions that in the realm of morality something incomparably higher is being dealt with. Thus we cannot merely switch off and disengage from moral reasoning. But a procedural account does not explain why this is the case. Along these same lines, the procedural moral theorist cannot explain why moral reasoning should be given a status over and above other forms of reasoning. Hare thinks that the answer to this lies in the logical. Having such a status is just what is meant by the *moral*.¹⁸ Habermas, on the other hand, takes the priority from the maturation of the discourse ethic.¹⁹ Neither of these views, however, can explain why it is that moral reasoning’s superiority *is* to be analytically equated with the moral, or why it is that it *is* a result of maturing in the history of culture or ontogenetically. In other words they cannot answer the question ‘Why be moral?’ in the same way that a qualitative distinction could. The only answer that Hare can give is that it is a matter of prudence. It is within someone’s *interest* to act morally.²⁰ But of course this does not give a reason for the action. It does not tell us what is uniquely valuable about the moral: ‘... the implication of these theories is that we have nothing to say which can impart insight. We can wax rhetorical and propagandise,

¹⁸See R. M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason*, 9.3

¹⁹Jürgen Habermas, *Moral consciousness and communicative action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992) chp.4; See also his *Theories of Communicative Action Volume One: Reason and the rationalisation of society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (London: Heinemann Press, 1984) and *Volume Two: Lifeworld and system: a critique of functionalist reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

²⁰R. M. Hare, *Moral Thinking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) chp.11.

but we can't say what's good or valuable about them, or why they command assent.²¹

The fact of the matter is that while a procedural ethic cannot explain the particular emphasis on the moral over and above other forms of reasoning and intuition, neither can it choose to do away with the distinction altogether. For in doing so it would be denying itself the notion of certain qualitative distinctions which are intrinsic, yet unarticulated, distinctions such as Hare's altruism or Habermas' mutual, universal consent in the ideal speech situation. The more one scrutinises the motives of procedural ethics, (what Nietzsche called the 'genealogy' of morals), the more self-contradictory they seem. They are all guided by some unarticulated, moral good such as freedom, altruism, or universalism, while at the same time rejecting any privileged conception of these goods. Like Rawls, such procedural ethicists need to come clean about their deeper moral sources, rather than assuming that they can build a theory upon 'thin' concepts alone.

Neo-Nietzschean Criticism

The procedural position of unarticulated qualitative distinctions has invited polemical attacks from several sides, including others who also would not want to affirm any realist concept of the good. Taylor identifies one such group as the 'neo-Nietzscheans' and discusses the philosophy of the late Michel Foucault as the most influential of these thinkers. Foucault, like Nietzsche, attends closely to the genealogy of moral frameworks. In doing so he criticises obligational theories in much the same vein of attack as Taylor. He spots the inconsistencies in their implicit moral genealogies such as the conception of freedom as a hypergood, or the undeniable, yet repressed moral motivations in these theories where claims of pure epistemology are made. However similar to Taylor's criticism, Foucault does not conclude from this that qualitative distinctions or constitutive goods exist. He uses

²¹*Sources of the Self*, p.87.

his criticism to debunk obligationist theories, but neglects to add any positive contribution in their place. What he does argue, however, is that our modern moral theories, like our epistemological ones, are merely institutions imposed on reality. There is no proclaimed position which is more or less justified.²²

Taylor, criticises Foucault's view as self-contradictory and indefensible since it assumes some pre-eminent objectification in a world of relativity and projection. Foucault, while critiquing various epistemologies as defined by particular epochs, nevertheless wants to argue that there can be no adjudicating between these epistemic vantage points. With such a claim, however, he is setting himself up as one outside of the relativism of 'savoir' and making an absolute discernment, *viz.* that each era has its own understanding of the rational and as such there can be no question of one being superior to another. It is not clear from his own admission—that one can only think in terms of one's own *episteme*—how he concludes that his own particular structure is the one to give credence to.

Approaching this from another angle, the neo-Nietzschean theory opens itself up to the same kind of criticism that it lobbies against the obligationists. There is an assumed, yet unarticulated moral source, a reliance on, yet denial of qualitative distinctions. Unlike the proceduralists, the neo-Nietzscheans do not deny any moral genealogy, yet they do make the fundamental error of giving their own moral sources a unique objectivism. This particular vantage point simply is not open to the human experience. For what is to say that this one view is absolute in a way that others are not? If all are relative, then so are they:

'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. So the meta-construal of the neo-Nietzschean philosopher—"in holding my moral position, I am imposing (or collaborating in the imposition of) a regime of truth on

²²See for example his early argument in *Les Mots et les Choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966). See also Taylor's critique of Foucault's later writings in 'Foucault on Freedom and Truth' in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*.

the chaos, and so does everyone”—is just as impossible as the meta-construal of the empiricist—“in holding my moral position, I am projecting values on a neutral world of facts, and so does everyone”. Both are incompatible with the way we cannot but understand ourselves in the actual practices which constitute holding that position: our deliberations, our serious assessments of ourselves and others. They are not construals you could actually make of your life while living it. They clash ... with the best available account of our moral life ... The neo-Nietzschean position falls afoul of the BA principle, just as the crasser forms of naturalism do.²³

The neo-Nietzscheans, like the obligationists, have an intricate genealogy of epistemological and moral motivations. One of the most important is the connection that Foucault makes between certain visions of the good and forms of domination. As Friedrich Schiller points out in *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, certain hypergoods have been used to suppress the true ‘nature’ of man in the Romantic era, and this in turn introduces relations of dominations within us.²⁴ There is much to be said for Foucault’s criticisms. Contemporary thinkers such as Carol Gilligan have brought to the fore the neglected and suppressed female moral formulations in a field dominated by a patriarchal system à la Kohlberg.²⁵ It is confusion, however, to conclude as Foucault does, that all such moral formulations are flawed, and that all theories of the good involve some form of domination. For if we allow that certain views are arbitrarily chosen, we are faced with the hopeless consequence of being unable to determine how it is that our views or anyone else’s are empowered by a vision of the good.

The Necessity of Articulation

This leads back to the original question of our need to articulate the good. For both these theories, the obligationist and the neo-Nietzschean, demonstrate a hidden

²³*Sources of the Self*, p.99.

²⁴See Friedrich Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, bilingual ed., ed. and trans. E. Wilkinson and C. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), particularly letter VI.

²⁵See Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

agenda for the good, which needs to be exposed. Apart from the empowering effect articulation of the good has, it can also help to clarify some of the underlying assumptions of many of our contemporary meta-theories which propose to deal with ethics in a way which denies any moral source whatsoever. Articulation in this way would help us to see our way clear in the modern debate.

Such a clarification is essential in terms of understanding various views in moral reasoning superseding one another. For to the extent that moral reasoning is a matter of one view replacing another as an error-reducing move, we can argue that there is a need to articulate the good, even if it is for no other purpose than to find such moral realist theories as inadequate and thereby move beyond them. Articulation in this sense would find the various contemporary theories coming out purged of this confusion about reality in a way that would make them stronger and more coherent.

There is indeed an impoverished state of affairs in regards to articulating the good in modern society. We are in many ways less capable of pointing to the moral sources of our beliefs than our forebears were. What is it that underpins our notion of universal respect, benevolence, or the rights of the individual? Traditional frameworks have to some extent become problematic, and in a society built on a bedrock of pluralism, where freedom is often associated with individual choice, we tend to avoid any attempt at reconciling views through moral reasoning and the authority of constitutive goods. It must be recognised, however, as Taylor clearly does, that there are incidents where the results of some past moral source still empower us today. For example, Iris Murdoch insists that while we may not hold to Plato's explanation of the cosmos, we can still nevertheless keep his picture of the sun as an analogue for some empowering source of the absolute.²⁶ The importance of many of the narrative traditions in our society is due to the moral weight these stories have which is a direct result of them being grounded in some religious or theological context, however crude.²⁷ The story of the Exodus from Egypt, for example, has been an inspiration to those in this century who see it as a forceful message of liberation

²⁶See Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, p.74.

from oppression.²⁸ Shrugging off the religious and transcendental trappings of the Exodus story still leaves them with an inspiring narrative regardless of their theological commitments.

Many of these empowering moral sources remain inarticulate in our society, and they are indeed difficult to bring to the surface. This, however, is not a persuasive reason for denying the importance of our moral sources, yet it does warn against articulating certain kinds of constitutive goods. It may perhaps lead us to look more discerningly on the kinds of goods that we would want to affirm.

Because as an empowering action articulation cannot be isolated from the whole speech act, it must be of a specific nature. The most powerful cases of articulation are those where the speaker, the formulation, and the act of delivering the message all line up together to reveal the good. For Taylor one of the most obvious examples of this is the Gospel narratives of Jesus Christ's life and teaching. They combine in such a harmony that the revelation of the good seems all-pervasive. The moral source of agape is so manifest in the Gospel that one is overwhelmed with the force of this articulation as it is released. The teachings of Jesus and the accounts of his life, this is precisely how 'words have power' for Taylor.²⁹

An imbalance of word or act or formulation distorts our picture of the good. Some may discount or distrust an articulation of the good as being counterfeit in this way. The speaker may utter words that are true, yet these may be contextualised in such a way as to connote the advocating of a disreputable status quo. 'Trite formulae may combine with the historical sham to weave a cocoon of moral assurance around us which actually insulates us from the energy of true moral sources.'³⁰

Many have reacted to this by insisting on silence. They argue that it is better not to engage in moral articulation at all. But categorical silence is not the answer. For Taylor argues, as Aristotle does, that if we were to stop articulating we would cease to be human. 'Without any articulation at all, we would lose all contact with

²⁷See Northrop Fry, *The Great Code* (Toronto: Academic Press, 1982).

²⁸See Michael Waltzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

²⁹See *Sources of the Self*, p.96, and Appendix E.

³⁰*Sources of the Self*, p.97.

the good, however conceived.’³¹ The issue involves which sorts of articulation are valid. Silence is promoted particularly with regards to qualitative distinctions. It is promoted by the philosophical stance of naturalism which Taylor has been addressing up to this point: metaphysical reasons issuing from a mechanistic concept of the cosmos, epistemological reasons involving foundational assumptions, and the moral emphasis on freedom and ordinary life goods.

Charles Taylor wants to hold on to these values of freedom and affirming ordinary life, but not in this system, and not without them being more fully articulated. He asks the question ‘Should we try to recover [qualitative distinctions] for moral thought, or are they best left in implicit limbo?’³²

As we have seen, those who embrace these values of freedom and the affirmation of ordinary life, yet claim no need for qualitative distinctions concerning these, live an inconsistency, and articulation helps to reveal this point. These values themselves are constitutive goods, they are moral sources for philosophers such as Foucault or Habermas. Inarticulacy and silence keeps this from being realised. Furthermore, when such systems are inspired by constitutive goods in this assumed, yet inexplicit manner, it confuses the way we engage in moral reasoning. It drives a wedge between two related features of morality, the ‘ethical’ considerations of action and those concerned with the ‘good life’. The devastating consequence is that we are then left with this narrow focus on the ethical which prevents us from asking questions which would link the two.

Arbitrating between Goods

Finally, Taylor sees articulation of the good, particularly constitutive goods, as a way of relieving tension between certain goods. On the one hand modern society is committed to certain hypergoods, in particular the demands of universal and equal respect and of modern self-determining freedom. On the other hand there is a concept

³¹Ibid., p.97.

of what must be sacrificed in their name, for example the goods of appetite and sensuality. I may want the good of sexual gratification, but deny it because of the hypergood of God's calling me to chastity.

Taylor first makes a distinction between the conflict between any incompatible goods, where a 'trade-off' is recognised and nothing of grave consequence occurs, and the tension between an established hypergood and the view that sees the sacrifice of the lower 'life' good as unacceptable. In the latter case the example of chastity and sexual gratification may not be as relevant as the example of family commitment and religious devotion. It may be that in order to devote myself further to prayer, I would need to sacrifice time spent with my children, and this I would consider unacceptable.

The unacceptability of such sacrifices, Taylor argues, arises from the modern affirmation of ordinary life. It has taken on many forms from the Romantic notion of harmony with 'nature' to the Nietzschean attacks on morality as a self-destructive force. The sides that have lined up against each other in modernity seem to be on the one hand the demands for reason, disengaged freedom, equality and universality, and on the other hand the right to fulfilment, self-expression, intimacy, and particularity. As Taylor formulates this picture coming out of the 18th century, we have on the former side the rationalist of the Enlightenment and on the latter side the expressivists such as Herder and the Romantics.³³

Taylor's fundamental argument is that the mainstream theories of morality which want to deny any legitimacy to the articulation of qualitative distinctions cannot get clear on the issues involved in this debate, even though they are caught in the middle of it. They cannot come to any real understanding about the conflict between hypergoods and other 'lower' goods. The obligationists concentrate on action and thereby cannot really conceive of the diversity of goods in a way that would recognise hypergoods as anything more than a logical property of moral language. The neo-Nietzscheans on the other hand deny their own hypergood by

³²Ibid., p.98.

³³This dichotomy that Taylor formulates at the end of Part I of *Sources of the Self* is outlined in various earlier works. See most notably, *Hegel*, chps.1&2.

seeing all morality as something imposed on reality. ‘The articulation of goods, which both these popular philosophies hamper owing to their ultimately confused meta-construals of our moral thinking, is an essential condition of seeing clearly in this whole range of disputes.’³⁴

Apart from these theories occluding the goods that they themselves implicitly embrace, they also contribute to a profound myopia in the modern moral debate about our extra-human ethics. The goods that they embrace are all anthropocentric, grounded in human concepts of freedom, benevolence, universal rights. Another debate which is active in our culture is whether we need to consider claims from non-human realms. In terms of human goods we either transfer some kind of human quality on the non-human form, something Timothy Sprigge or Peter Singer would promote,³⁵ or we look at it in the light of prudence and long-term human purchase. We do not see the deforestation of certain areas as wrong in and of itself, we see it as detrimental to human existence. But can there be a claim for certain environmental goods which do not have any human ramifications or consequences? Articulation of goods can help to clarify these questions, simply because it will reveal the human-centred prejudice of certain goods such as freedom and benevolence which modern theories inarticulately are inspired by:

‘This is another one of those cramps which philosophies of obligatory action, and I would also claim neo-Nietzschean theories, put in our moral thinking ... they are blinkers which prevent us from acknowledging the force of goods, leave us unmoved by them, or, if we are moved, induce us to misidentify this as some non-moral emotion. The negative focus on the good as a source of crushing guilt or, alternatively, of a smug sense of superiority ends up making us unwilling to admit how a constitutive good can interpellate us, move us, empower us. All this speaks strongly in favour of the attempt to articulate the good in some kind of philosophical prose.’³⁶

³⁴*Sources of the Self*, p.102.

³⁵See for example Timothy Sprigge’s ‘‘Are there Intrinsic Values in Nature?’’, in *Applied Philosophy: morals and metaphysics in contemporary debate*, eds. Brenda Almond and Donald Hill (London: Routledge, 1991), and Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation*, 2nd ed. (London: Thorsons, 1991).

³⁶*Sources of the Self*, p.103.

Articulating these goods not only reveals what modern moral theories are committed to and yet deny, but furthermore, placing such articulations in an historical context can help to clarify how it came about that such goods were eventually suppressed. This is important in two senses. First it traces concepts such as freedom or respect back to earlier religious or metaphysical views and thus gives us a clearer idea of what kind of transformation has occurred in the modern moral theory. Secondly, such an exercise of back-tracking to an earlier form of the good may help clarify the implicit character of this modern good which was openly avowed then, but may be suppressed today. For example, Taylor thinks that the modern hostility of the utilitarian to what he calls 'hypergoods' stems from an affirmation of ordinary life goods. The origin of such goods is theological. It involves a positive vision of life's activities as ordained goods granted by God. Our working life, our family relationships, are all incidences of holiness. Modern naturalism, however, not only refuses to accept this explanation, but it has divested itself of the language surrounding this origin.³⁷ But Taylor argues that some sense of this origin still characterises the affirmation of ordinary life today, and by articulating this good we turn to its predecessor and ask to what extent it is still relying on the presumptions of this spiritual explanation which it allegedly repudiate. As Taylor points out, it cannot be denied that naturalism draws on a similar spiritual energy, of which it cannot give an account, or at least not fully.

A Hunch about Articulacy

Taylor concludes his moral argument with a hunch, a prediction about the outcome of articulacy, which in effect is the final argument for such articulations. He believes that in engaging in philosophical reasoning whereby we articulate the goods which frame our moral beliefs, we will find ourselves caught on both sides of the

³⁷See Jean Bethke Elshtain, 'The risks and responsibilities of affirming ordinary life', in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*.

divide. We will embrace both the rationalist and expressivist commitments and thereby come up against a particularly daunting inconsistency in our lives.

This assertion is well sustained in Taylor's developments of *Sources of the Self* which follow on from Part I. The modern self affirms the right for dignity of all humankind, yet wants to assert his own individualism and inwardness. He puts a great deal of credence into the affirmation of everyday life, yet also implicitly understands certain hypergoods as sources for moral intuitions. The modern cannot deny such moral sources, as Taylor argues, since these play an intricate role in defining one's personal identity. We are selves partly in light of the fact that we have defined moral horizons which are developed in narrative and in community. There is a connection here between four main features which are intertwined in Taylor's historical outline: our notion of the good, our understanding of the self, the kinds of narratives we have to make sense of our lives, and conceptions of society. These features have developed through history together and Taylor understands them collectively as giving us a clue to the divisions of the modern self. So for example we affirm the side of the Enlightenment rationalism in modern society by seeing its make-up as individual persons in consent, living as free bearers of individual rights. On the other hand we see modern society as a unified nation, 'drawn together by similar expressive roots' which demonstrates our debt to expressivist values of self-understanding.³⁸

Because the modern condition is no longer admitting to any important role for the good, it cannot understand our selves as needing to be grounded in some moral framework. Thus it cannot come to grips with the deeply-rooted tension between Enlightenment rationalism and Romantic expressivism, since it is 'quite unaware of the way in which our modern sense of the self is bound up with and depends on what one can call a "moral topography"'.³⁹

³⁸The political ramifications of this are forcefully expounded in *Multiculturalism*.

³⁹*Sources of the Self*, p.106. See also Taylor's 'Moral Topography of the Self', in *Hermeneutics and Psychological Theory*, eds. Stanley Messer, Louis Sass, and Robert Woolfolk (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

Reconciliation through Articulation

Here there is a problem by Taylor's own admission. For if we in our modern society are embracing certain moral goods which will ultimately conflict with one another, and if these goods help to define who we are as persons, then choosing one kind of good over another will lead to self-abnegation. We are denying something that will ultimately prove to be self-defining.

Some have chosen to remain inarticulate about one side or the other for reasons connected with this dilemma, but Taylor makes a bold claim and purposes that articulating such goods will not lead to division, but to *reconciliation* through greater lucidity. Reconciliation of this sort is the 'goal and fruit' of articulating. Taylor believes that this is possible, but the ultimate requirement is that we must hold ourselves to the goods that we cannot escape from—those that make the best sense of the way we live our lives and explain most those things we find valuable. Here, as before, the BA principle can function as a test for genuineness.

A good example to raise in conclusion is the conflict Taylor deals with in *The Ethics of Authenticity*. The modern has a desire to self-fulfilment, to obtain the ideal of 'authenticity', yet this is often seen as selfishness, and criticised by thinkers such as Alan Bloom as harmful to modern society. Taylor, however, argues that in articulating what is involved in the need for authenticity we can come to see that it requires certain features which bring it into harmony with a development in community. First, the moral development of an individual must be understood in terms of how that individual is living with other individuals. The ideal of authenticity incorporates some notion of society, but it also places a great deal of emphasis on relationships. We need others in order to be fulfilled. This comes into play in understanding the affirmation of ordinary life, where we stress fulfilment through our friendships, and familial relationships. As Taylor argues, this is the prime locus of our self-exploration and discovery. Secondly, we need moral horizons in order to understand ourselves and fulfil our lives, and in building these we are bringing into

play those around us. So by articulating what it really means to have an ideal of authenticity, Taylor points out that it is not incompatible with other 'higher' goods such as moral demands beyond the self, or unconditional relationships based on love. Rather, this ideal actually requires these other goods in some form if it is to be truly realised. Articulation both releases us from the suppressed and eschewed moral positions that we hold, and defines more clearly in our lives the empowering goods we seek.

For Christian ethics the ramifications of such a moral ontology which argues for articulating implicit moral sources are great. Both practically and theoretically Taylor's argument can be brought to bear on the shape of theology, and the pragmatic application of theology in the world. This is discussed in Part III, primarily in the context of examining the character of Christian ethics. Before this investigation, however, it would help to look at Christian thinkers who have had a significant impact on Taylor. As a Roman Catholic Taylor has found an important philosophical sounding board in Augustine, but he has also felt a strong affinity towards two modern Jesuit theologians, Yves Congar and Henri de Lubac, who have played an instrumental role in shaping the structure of modern Catholic thought. Part II of this thesis begins by comparing Taylor with Augustine, and follows with an examination of these modern Jesuit theologians and their influence on Taylor's Christianity. Through this the importance of Taylor as a Christian thinker will become clearer. What will arise is an understanding of Taylor as a philosopher concerned with articulating his moral theory within a particular theological framework.

PART II



*Theological Webs
of
Interlocution*

CHAPTER FOUR



Taylor and Augustine: Some Parallels in Theological Anthropology

This chapter will examine some of the significant theological links between Charles Taylor and Augustine. It should be pointed out, however, that since Augustine's philosophical theology has had a tremendous impact on the development of Western thought as a whole, it may sometimes be difficult to distinguish the direct influence he has had on Taylor. In some respects Augustine's ideas can be seen as a watershed pervading all of Christendom with its flood of neo-Platonism. So it may be argued that to the extent that Taylor sympathises with Plato, he aligns himself with Augustine. Taylor, however, would be the first to point out the important developments away from Plato that Augustine had achieved. Augustine's idea of the will, for example is seminal in understanding the development of moral psychology in the West and Taylor pays it great tribute in *Sources of the Self*. On the other hand there are some aspects of Augustinianism which Taylor finds difficult to embrace. Where this occurs one can see Taylor working to articulate his own alternative theological commitments. Overall however, Augustine is an important wellspring for Taylor both through his influence in Western thought generally and because of his particular theological pronouncements regarding the self, the natural order, and man's relationship to God.

Manichaeism

To understand Augustine's philosophical theology it is best to see it developing in the context of his early religious belief and the move away from that to orthodox Christianity. Augustine's conversion from Manichaeism was a dramatic event in his life, and one that became a major factor in the evolution of his moral theology. Within his pursuit of 'Wisdom' as a Manichee 'hearer' the most difficult philosophical problem was the existence of evil in the world. Mani, taking an ideological stance half-way between his own Persian background and the popular Gnostic beliefs of the day, had developed a religion which saw man as a mixture of two opposing forces. The Manichees, however, went a step beyond their Gnostic progenitors and took on a picture of the universe as a cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil. As Peter Brown has remarked, 'Mani was a religious genius ... No religious system, indeed, had ever treated the visible world so drastically, and with such literalism, as an externalisation of an inner, spiritual conflict.'¹

The picture of the universe that emerged was not one to which the educated Roman would have been accustomed. The kind of fierce struggle between good and evil in the universe was foreign to most of the Greek philosophers that were read at the time, since the large majority of them owed their origins to Socrates and Plato in one form or another, and a key feature of their metaphysics was an ultimate ordered cosmos as a holistic reality. According to them, when one rises to this cosmic order, the struggle disappears.²

The idea was more at home, however, in the Jewish tradition. One can see a similar struggle in the history of Israel in the Old Testament whereby one was either aligned with God or His enemy. This condition affected the people of Israel both collectively and individually. King David's life, for example, can be described in exactly these terms where one sees this tension existing as a result of his relationship

¹Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967) p.56.

²See for example Plotinus' *Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna, abridged ed. (London: Penguin, 1991). Plotinus was the most influential Greek philosopher coming out of the Platonic tradition for Augustine. The ninth Tractate of the second Ennead directly addresses the issue of cosmic evil.

with Jehovah. The Manichaeism of Augustine's early years took up this cosmic struggle from the Jewish tradition, but espoused in their concept of Dualism was the idea that there was a tremendously powerful force of evil in the world opposing the force of good.

It is interesting to see this link with Judaism since in other respects Manichaeism sought to distance itself from the theology of the Old Testament. This was most obviously seen in the idea of the deity. According to Mani, the creator of the Old Testament was distinct from the God of the New Testament. The former was an evil being bent on destruction and oppression who had imprisoned spiritual beings in this material creation on earth.³ Running through this doctrine was a strong mind/body or spirit/material dualism whereby the former is imprisoned in the latter. Thus there is a notion that humans are prisoners of the material world which surrounds them as a force of evil. The Redeemer of the New Testament came to save humankind from sin, but this sin is intricately and inextricably linked to the physical body. As a force of good the Redeemer can lead us out of this world of imprisonment—lead us, in effect out of us. The hope was to arrive at the elevated state described by the Manichaean Psalmist who writes, 'the vain garment of this flesh I put off, safe and pure; I caused the clean feet of my soul to trample confidently upon it.'⁴ Thus it is important to note that this early theology that Augustine had been following as a student was one where the idea of evil was something extremely (and quite literally) tangible and rooted in reality itself.

Being as Good

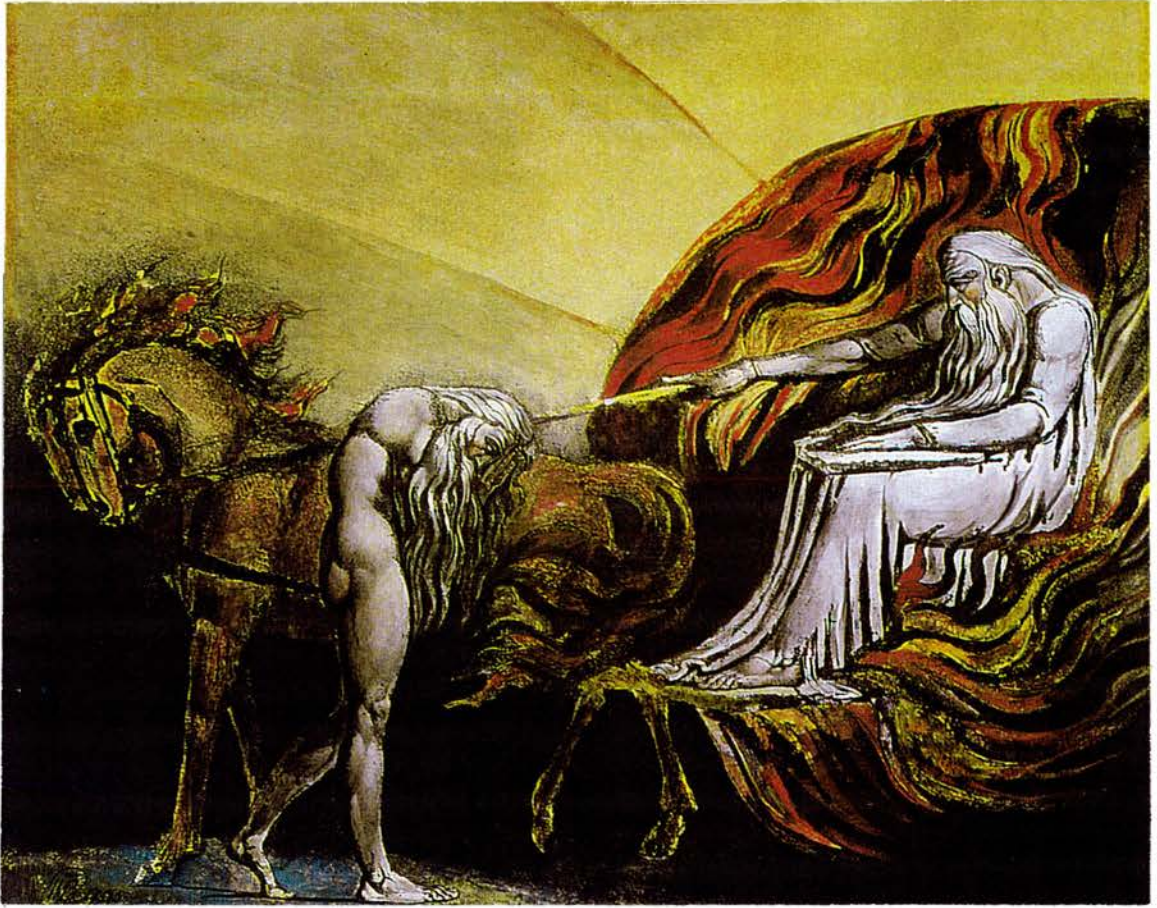
Reading Plato became one of the most compelling reasons for Augustine to convert to orthodox Christianity. This was due mainly to the Greek philosopher's ontology. Augustine approached Plato through the philosophy of Plotinus whom he

³This idea is picked up by William Blake in an interesting way at the end of the 18th century with the character of Elohim. See for example his colour print *Elohim Creating Adam* (fig. 3) or the many versions of *God Judging Adam*, a composition dominated by God's 'flames of eternal fury' (fig. 4).

⁴See C. R. C. Allberry, *A Manichaean Psalmbook*, Part II, Manichaean Manuscripts in the Chester Beatty Collection, vol. ii, 1938, p.97.



3. William Blake, *Elohim Creating Adam*, 1795/c. 1805, Tate Gallery, London



4. William Blake, *God Judging Adam*, 1795, Tate Gallery, London

felt was so close to the ancient master that in him Plato seemed to live again.⁵ His sympathy for the Platonists was at times unequivocal, particularly in terms of moral theory, so that in the *Civitas Dei* he argues that Platonism is morally superior in its treatment of values to any other philosophy.⁶ Several of the key features of Augustine's theology were formulated from the raw material offered him in this philosophical system, but in choosing to take the route of orthodox Christianity over Manichaeism the compelling factor which Platonism shared with the former, and which convinced Augustine, was the very idea of *being*.

Plato and orthodox Christianity have in common the important principle that being is in itself good. Whatever is there and whatever exists is fundamentally blameless. It may be that something has deviated from its proper form and thus has become evil, but evil is nothing more than a perversion of good, a privation of true being. Plato understood that the things that are most real, that exist in the greatest sense of the word, were the Forms (*ιδεαι*) and these are clearly good. When we see the nature of things we will see that these Ideas form a kind of whole, an order in which they all fit. This order has a principle underlying it, namely the idea of the Good (*το αγαθον*). This means that there is a good involved in order, but also a good involved in the ontology of this order. Those objects in the flux that imitate Forms are less than real, but to that extent they are also less than good. So being is in direct ratio to goodness for Plato.⁷

This same basic idea is central to the kind of mainstream Christianity emerging from Judaism.⁸ From the beginning in Genesis there is a picture of God creating the universe—light, water, vegetation, creatures—and seeing them as good. There is a rich celebration of being in this creation, of seeing ontology as a gift from God.⁹ Here Plato and mainline Christianity unite. Contrasted to this is the Gnostic

⁵*Contra Academicos*, in *The Works of St. Augustine*, trans. and ed. M. Dods, 15 vols. (Edinburgh, 1871-1876) III, xviii, 41.

⁶*Civitas Dei*, in *The Works of St. Augustine*, trans. and ed. M. Dods, 15 vols. (Edinburgh, 1871-1876) VIII. viii-x.

⁷See *Republic* Bk.VII.

⁸That the orthodox tradition was established contrary to and against the Gnostic ideology reveals the truth of this point.

⁹This undergirds Taylor's idea of agape as 'seeing good' in an extremely important way. See Chapter 8.

attitude to the Hebrew Bible whereby the creator was seen as an evil deity and the key for Gnostic Christianity was to break out of this Hebrew tradition.

One of the significant differences between these two stances was the attitude to evil in the world. In the Manichaean tradition there was a simple solution to the problem of evil. Because of their doctrine of the duality of God, they could off-load the responsibility of evil from the good god (as well as the human agent) onto this evil force in the nature of the universe. The orthodox stance, on the other hand, generated the problem of theodicy which Boethius has articulated: *Si Deus justus—unde malum?* If God is good and all powerful, then why is there suffering and evil in the world?¹⁰ This is taken off the agenda by the line of thinking Mani had adopted from the Gnostics. The cause of evil for Manichees was simply found in the nature of things.

Orthodox Christianity developing out of Judaism had completely different variables to work with. Instead of a limited God, they had an omnipotent creator who was benevolent. But if a good God who is all powerful exists, and things are still going wrong then one of the important reasons for them going wrong has to do with human agency. We are in some way at odds with, estranged from God, and this has an important responsibility for evil in the world according to the orthodox tradition. So where the move to Gnosticism or Manichaeism relieves this tension, the mainline Christian view that Augustine eventually embraced had this central dilemma of evil in the world and the responsibility of man for this evil.¹¹

Augustine saw the possibility of synthesising Platonic thought and Christianity along the axis of what the two had in common—being as something intrinsically good. At the same time, however, this brought up the problem of evil. As a result of rejecting Manichaeism, Augustine becomes one of the most important

¹⁰See Boethius, *Consolations of Philosophy*, trans. V. E. Watts (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969) Bk.IV. This is still one of the crucial questions in the Philosophy of Religion today. See for example the volume *The Problem of Evil*, eds. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹¹It is interesting to note that the philosopher and economist Eric Voegelin has reintroduced the term 'Gnostic' for a whole variety of modern thinkers who are off-loading the responsibilities and consequences of human action onto historical forces. See particularly his *Science, Politics and Gnosticism* (Chicago: Regnery, 1968) and *Order and History Volume Two: The World of the Polis* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1957).

articulators of the view that what is of ultimate importance is not simply the continuing cosmic order, but the issue of how one *stands* to this order. The way he does this is in a theory of the will.

The Will and Desire

No strong concept of the will exists in Greek moral philosophy, though it does begin to develop in the Stoics, as can be seen in Epictetus' use of the term *προαιρεσις* in the *Discourses*.¹² For Augustine, however, it becomes of central importance to understanding moral action and intent. The question could be asked why we need a further concept of will, beyond our understanding of simple desires. One reason is because in one sense what we 'desire' to do, is not always what we want to do. For example, I want to drink a glass of wine in the afternoon, but this will make me drowsy and keep me from concentrating on my work, and so I abstain. In one sense I 'desire' that glass of wine, but in another sense I weigh up the consequences and my obligations, and come to a decision not to drink the wine. So in this respect one can talk about deciding *between* desires. The desire to have a glass of wine is in some way negated by the intention linked to the other desire to concentrate and get my work done.

Approaching this from another angle the word 'will' becomes a useful concept. Instead of us thinking in terms of desires and reflections of what is good (Aristotle's use of the word *προαιρεσις*) one can speak of an 'all things considered' desire. This is in a sense what I am doing when I resist the glass of wine. I am looking at everything together, thinking about the effects of the wine, my responsibility, the good of working and finishing a project, of fulfilling my potential in this way, and so I resist the temptation.

¹²See Epictetus, *Discourses and Manual: together with fragments of his writing*, 2 vols., trans. P. E. Matheson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916) I:17.23; III:3.14, 7.5, 18.1. For a helpful discussion of the 'will' in the history of moral psychology see Charles Kahn, 'Discovery of the Will: From Aristotle to Augustine', in *The Question of Eclecticism*, ed. J. M. Dillon and A. A. Long (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988).

This kind of desire, unlike the desire of the first sense, is extracted from the whole process and can be called 'will'. This is the concept developed by the Stoics. Their sole concern was the condition of this element, whether it was correct, good and void of passion. Taking a radically extreme view of self-determination, they argued that this was all that could be considered to be under the subject's control.¹³ For they believed that once a decision has been made to do something good, whether or not you can then go on to the next stage and produce this action is something that does not depend on you, and therefore does not matter. What is important is the notion of ultimate intention, moving from initial desire to will, as Epictetus indicates in this famous passage from the *Discourses*:

'I must die. But must I die groaning? I must be imprisoned. But must I whine as well? I must suffer exile. Can any one then hinder me from going with a smile, and a good courage, and at peace? "Tell the secret." I refuse to tell, for this is in my power. "But I will chain you." What say you, fellow? Chain me? My leg you will chain—yes, but my will (proairesis)—no, not even Zeus can conquer that. ... These are the thoughts that those who pursue philosophy should ponder, these are the lessons they should write down day by day, in these they should exercise themselves.'¹⁴

This is one reason to introduce the concept of will, one which did not really exist with Plato and Aristotle. In contrast to the Stoics, the Greeks focused primarily on good action. Of course, from time to time good action would be frustrated and good intention was important. Likewise a good person is one who does good action out of good intentions, willingly not fighting against himself. Yet the whole focus of this process was on *eupraxia*. Thus there is no important role for the concept we would be tempted to translate as 'will'. Aristotle, however, does use a term which is often translated this way, but it refers to something earlier in the process of deliberation. This is *βουλησις*. *Βουλησις* is the desire that one has which is informed by some sense of the good. If on one level I have a desire for the glass of wine (*ἐπιθυμία*) I have on another level an Aristotelian *βουλησις* to do whatever is best to keep my mind focused on my work, since this is the good. I would then go

¹³See W. J. Oates, *The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers*, quoted in Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961) p. 270.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 270.

through a process that tells me that drinking the wine would cloud my judgement, and make it impossible to carry out this *βουλησις*. So there exist two initial desires, one of which cancels out the other. At the end of the process it is my ‘all things considered’ will which wins out. The English translation of this today is often ‘wish’, which itself is misleading since it carries with it the connotation of impotence. If I say ‘I wish she would tell me what was wrong,’ it seems I am in no position to affect the outcome, but simply have this great desire that it would happen. The wish in this sense is sealed off from the action, but this is exactly not what *βουλησις* is. It is directly informed by the good and directly relevant to deliberation and action. It would not be *βουλησις* if it did not have this capacity to influence the chain of events. The translation of ‘will’ in this sense would also be a mistake. When a ruler says ‘my will is that ... ’ he does not mean ‘I have a sudden desire for this’, but rather, ‘All things considered, this is what I want to happen.’

Strong and Weak Wills

One development arising from this is the notion of the will as strong or weak, a distinction which Aristotle does not make. What has come to play an important role in certain moral psychologies is the idea that there are individuals with strong wills, and individuals with weak wills, and there is a crucial difference between the two kinds of people. In the former case the ‘all things considered’ will is very finely developed and actually has an effect on the way the person acts. In the latter case, weak-willed people go through the process of determining what the ‘all things considered’ desire would be, and decide that that would be the best thing to do, but they just cannot stop themselves from drinking the wine. They know it is the wrong thing to do, but they do not have the ‘will power’ to resist. Despite having understood what is the best thing to do, this weakness of will nevertheless ends up short-circuiting the whole process. Aristotle discusses this in Book VII of *Nicomachean Ethics* as an absence of force, *ἀκρασία*. He has a great deal of difficulty coming to terms with this weakness of the human agent, since he is fundamentally under the

influence of the powerful set of framework concepts that Socrates has laid down where once someone sees that something is the right thing to do, normally he ought to be motivated to do it. Seeing the good ought to be sufficient to motivate one to do the good. People who do not do good are people who really do not *see* these things as good. Aristotle, in order to fit this with the obvious inconsistencies in human nature, describes a picture of someone who sees the good, yet his vision is then eclipsed at a certain point and he fails to carry out this good—he reaches out and grabs the glass of wine. *Akrasia* for Aristotle is a kind of temporary insanity or temporary eclipse of one's rational grasp of the situation.

There is a very different reading of the situation in Paul's Epistle to the Romans. 'We know that the law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want (*θελω*) to do I do not do, but what I hate I do' (Romans 7.14-16).¹⁵ C. H. Dodd describes Paul's situation as an 'intense experience of divided personality':

'So complete is the separation between the will to do and the deed, that the man feels that some alien power in him is actually performing his actions. Paul is not meaning to shuffle out of responsibility for his actions by ascribing them to the alien power. What he wishes to show is how completely he is under the thraldom of sin—so completely that he sins against his wish.'¹⁶

This is the idea of the will taken up by Augustine: it is quite possible for humans to see clearly what the good is to be done and yet not do it.¹⁷ It is also an important reason for talking of a 'will' in a moral context which does not exist in Plato and Aristotle, but which has become an essential part of our modern moral psychology. We believe that it is important to have 'will power' to carry something out, to be able to 'steel your will' against opposition, etc.

¹⁵All Biblical citations in this thesis are taken from the New International Version.

¹⁶C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Fontana, 1959) p.131.

¹⁷This comes out quite clearly in Augustine's early arguments in *De libero arbitrio*, in *The Works of St. Augustine*, trans. and ed. M. Dods, 15 vols. (Edinburgh, 1871-1876). For the significance of this Pauline text to Augustine as he was addressing the objections of the Manichees and later Pelagius see Peter Brown, *Augustine*, pp.148-157.

The Will and Direction

Another dimension of talking about the will that is particularly important for Augustine has to do with the way one turns either towards God or away from Him. Here the will is placed in the context of the human's relationship to the God of the cosmic order. As indicated earlier, the orthodox Christian view in counter-distinction to the Gnostic, did not see evil as part of the natural order of things, but saw it as a result of man's relationship to this natural order of things. So the Jewish tradition, and the orthodox Christianity which arose out of that tradition stands in direct conflict with the Greek idea of *cosmos*.

Cosmos has semantically built into it the notion of order. For Plato and Socrates the order of the universe had an important normative role in cosmology. The ultimate reference point in Jewish tradition, however, is not order but Jehovah's action. He is a God who establishes a covenant with his people. He calls them out of Egypt, and raises up leaders such as Joshua and David. In these actions He is establishing a relationship with the Israelite nation. Thus how the Jewish people stood in relation to God, whether they were turned towards Him or away from Him, was paramount.¹⁸

It follows from this that in the Judeo-Christian tradition the ultimate understanding of the human is through history—that relationship between God and man whereby God is acting in the world. While the cosmos is ever present, God's action in history is the normative framework which is continuously changing.¹⁹ Thus the Jews had the notion of a Messiah before the turn of the millennium as Christians

¹⁸In addition to the history of the Israelites, the metaphors of creation in the Old Testament re-emphasise the dependency of man as creature on Jehovah the creator. This dependency establishes all the more clearly the normative stance of this relational experience. See for example, Ronald Simkins, *Creator and Creation: Nature in the Worldview of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994) esp. chps.3&4.

¹⁹Nowhere is this more evident than in the Old Testament where the true character of Jehovah is unveiled *not* primarily through monological discourses, but through the *history* of His chosen people. Neither is this simply a contingent truth, for God has meaning in our lives as He is understood in the historical, narrative framework of our existence. So this history between *us* *must* be the locus for our understanding.

have a concept of Christ as the Messiah who will come again. We are orientated in history, set up against a *telos* and underlying this is the sovereignty of God.²⁰

This explains why the idea of conversion was so important to Augustine. The will for him was not simply strong or weak, but good or evil. The fundamental difference is the direction that it is turning. While this is analogous to the way Plato talks about the eye of the soul (turning towards the light or away from the light), introducing the concept of the will completely alters Plato's understanding of what it means to be drawn to the good. The twist Augustine gives to this turning is that one's direction—towards God or away from Him—is a question of the will. Built into his framework is the idea that a perversion of the will could take place which would resist the insight to turn towards the Good. In the case of being restored, the person, even before he truly sees God's greatness, has a desire to turn towards Him. For Plato, people either see the good and want to turn to it or they fail to see it and do not turn. With Augustine, however, there is something independent of the level of insight which is directing the will one way or another.

One need only think of the figure of Lucifer in Milton's poem *Paradise Lost* in order to see a perfect example of the Augustinian will. Lucifer as the highest of the angels was the closest to God. Nevertheless, he turned against Him and was cast out of heaven to work against God forever. The moral psychology implicit here indicates that Lucifer exercises something like this kind of Augustinian will. He was completely aware of the greatness of God, and by definition was not someone whose weak will was dragging him into situations against an 'all things considered' will. Nevertheless this angel, with total knowledge of God's glory, was able to turn against Him. In this decision there was something more at work than simply whether he could see the good clearly or not. If Lucifer were a Platonic figure he would have to be in some way blinded. Yet there is something about Milton's Lucifer which involuntarily commands our respect—he is a noble figure. This greatness is not because Milton was siding with evil in his poem, but implicit in the whole picture of

²⁰It is of interest to note that the most powerful objection to Aquinas by William of Ockham and the Nominalists was that he was abandoning the sovereignty of God as a defining characteristic and buying into the Aristotelian idea of ultimacy of nature. See Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967) and more specifically his *William of Ockham* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975).

this rebellion is Lucifer as a figure completely in control of the situation (Baudelaire describes Milton's character as 'que le plus parfait type de Beauté virile').²¹ It is not a rebellion mitigated by the circumstances, but one taken up by an extremely powerful will.²²

This brings up another important dimension to moral psychology which Augustine had developed, and that is the unhealthiness of souls as a consequence of Original Sin. The spiritual healthiness of a person, again, depended upon his or her relationship to God. If people had remained in their originally created condition, they would have healthy souls. Because of the Fall, however, this crucial link with God is broken. Our wills are now unhealthy and only through God's intervention, through His grace, can we be turned again and healed.

This, of course, became a major issue in the western legacy from Augustine. Augustine had set the agenda for the Reformation whereby one's stand on this question to a certain extent defined one as a Reformer or Catholic. Furthermore, in the Enlightenment this doctrine was systematically negated. The very idea of original sin, that there was something fundamentally wrong or distorted about human beings and their desires, was vehemently challenged.

Augustine's theory of the will can be seen as part of his emphasis on inwardness, that quality of the self which Taylor discusses in Chapter 7 of *Sources of the Self* which ^{is} devoted to the Church Father. This inwardness is not, however, that characteristic of the modern culture which philosophers such as Alan Bloom have criticised so heavily as leading to a selfish and self-destructing individualism.²³ Augustine's inwardness leads eventually upwards to God, and this is an important feature which Taylor himself attempts to keep hold of in his modern moral theory. Because the importance for Augustine is not ultimately the order of nature, but the sovereignty of God and mankind's relationship to God, the focus of inward reflection will finally reflect this higher relationship.

²¹Quoted from Pascal Pia, *Baudelaire* (Paris: Sevil, 1952) p.88.

²²I owe this example to Charles Taylor.

²³See Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987) p.61.

God and the Natural Order

Augustine did, however, believe in a natural order of things, but one that was ultimately controlled by God. To have a vision of this order amounts to a vision of reason, and the good for humans is to see and love this order which reveals God through His thoughts.²⁴ One can see here the marked parallels between Augustine's metaphysics and Plato's Theory of the Forms. In addition, one can also see the tremendous influence Augustine's theory of the will as linked to a rational order has had on thinkers such as Rousseau, Kant and Baudelaire.²⁵

Taylor is reluctant to follow Augustine in believing in an *absolute* order for several reasons. For one thing the limits of human understanding preclude the possibility that we could, given enough wisdom, come to see this order fully. While recognising that history has developed important frameworks of order and what the ordered life should be, he contends that the ultimate vocation of human beings is beyond all of these.²⁶ The idea of putting a formula to our absolute purpose in life seems misplaced since '... our best constructed analysis always has this principle of disturbance and therefore there is an act of faith involved.'²⁷

Here Taylor is not as far from Augustine as it might at first appear. He sees certain indications of order, e.g., intuitions of what it is like to be a good human being, and as such these are impressions similar to the kind that were important for Augustine in arguing for the existence of God. The danger Taylor sees, however, is setting these up as self-sufficient. He wants to allow for the fact that there may be demands upon one as a human agent beyond what she or he intuitively sees as good, as fulfilling. These demands may even cancel out other goods, may lead to the renunciation of fulfilment. There is the possibility of '... bringing myself and my humanity closer to God in the very act of failure, or suffering—something very important might be happening, which just gets beyond your horizon if you think that

²⁴See Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* (London: Gollancz, 1961).

²⁵For Taylor's discussion of this see *Sources of the Self*, pp.361-367, 434-435.

²⁶See Appendix C.

²⁷Ibid.

that's all there is to say in your conception of the human life.'²⁸ Shutting out these possibilities for Taylor is not only wrong, but can be terribly destructive.

The belief in some comprehensive order which answers all our questions entails an extremely cramped view of God's character. While wanting to say that there is an important place for the doctrine of creation whereby a loving God has made this world as a gift to us and set it up in such a way that is for our good, Taylor nevertheless feels that breaking the bounds of these earlier notions of cosmos was a very positive move in the Enlightenment. This is primarily due to the problems that existed in the propositions of providence of the Leibnizian kind whereby one understands the cosmos as something designed ultimately for the human good:

'We can't understand in just human terms the kinds of things we grapple at as human beings. In these terms providence can't be understood, and will always subvert if you think that it's there to produce a harmonious happy world in that sense; and we are struggling very much to understand that providence, and the condition to understanding it is such a transition from being absolutely anthropocentric to being 'theocentric', to use this expression. We have trouble until this is totally achieved.'²⁹

This is one of the ways that Taylor can approach the problem of evil. To see the incongruity between a loving creator and evil in the world is in some sense looking from a jaundiced view. What we need to ask is 'Are the goods of God first and foremost necessarily the goods of mankind?' An alternative is to see the relationship between God and man as analogous to a feudal order. The nobleman does not exist to benefit the peasants, but he does so from time to time. We have become used to thinking of higher goods as being in the end better for human beings than even what human beings themselves understand as good. But what if the situation were closer to the polytheism of the Greeks than we would want to imagine? It could be that like the gods of Olympus, certain purposes of God are good, but do not even purport to be good for humans.

The Greek poet Euripides explored this dilemma in the tragedy *Hippolytus*. Determined to make an allegiance to either Aphrodite or Artemis, Hippolytus

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹See Appendix A.

chooses the latter, becoming fanatically chaste, and enraging the Goddess of Love. One of the points of Euripides' play is that the gods were following a different moral order, and that in such an order imbalances of the kind Hippolytus was guilty of were permissible and good. Thus a goddess like Artemis could be completely devoted to chastity, but a human was meant for an entirely different realm, and was considered to be transgressing his moral framework in such a whole-hearted devotion as Hippolytus was displaying.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition a similar idea has been best articulated by the prophet Isaiah. 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts' (Isaiah 55.8-9). In this sense divine and human good cannot fit together without an alteration in human goods. In the beginning of their relationship God's favouring Israel is expressed in terms of human goods—the fruitfulness of Abraham, the promised land of the exiled people flowing with milk and honey, etc. But in the story of Job an entirely different set of questions about what the human good entails comes into play, and what is developed is the notion of a self-transcendence to a higher good.

Taylor sees that the acts of God can be interpreted as either single and coherent, or multiple and disparate. If one thinks that they incorporate the human good, then he will think of them as coherent. Once one has established that the goods of God are to conform to human goods, however, there is an inconsistency in the world. This Taylor sees as one of the biggest reasons why people in the modern world cannot believe in God. Everything in our modern experience from quantum physics to the Holocaust has demolished the notion that a good creator has established a providence which is ultimately concerned with human good. The option taken in modern history has been to drop God from the equation. For exactly '... to the extent that people are still hanging onto those older views, to that extent there is a tremendous inclination to unbelief, to despair, to turning off the whole thing, which is one of the very powerful engines of unbelief.'³⁰

³⁰Ibid.

Grace and Human Limits

Another way of approaching this for Taylor is from the standpoint of limitations. On the one hand there is a high degree of confidence in our powers of human creation since the 18th century. The limits of what had to be taken as the natural order of things have been pushed aside since the Enlightenment and the predominance of science. Taylor sees problems with this in so much as it negates the Christian sense of limit, and fails to include the possibility of goods beyond our control.³¹ On the other hand he notes with caution that ‘... to the extent that the sense of limit was founded just on a lack of imagination, conservative structures and so on, getting rid of that is something very important.’³²

Freeing ourselves from these limits in another sense for Taylor can also include freeing ourselves from human limitations. It is a criticism he finds in Dostoyevsky which he discusses at the end of *Sources of the Self*.³³ The limitations here are those of the modern demands of universal beneficence. He asks the question ‘What is the motor which allows you to go on and on putting demands on yourself to help others?’ The answer usually is a sense of human dignity, but there are severe limitations to the reliability of this ideal:

‘The vision of Dostoyevsky ... is what you need in order to carry through on this [set of modern moral demands] is an acute sense of human beings as objects of love, objects of God’s love that you can participate in. That empowers you in a way that the ordinary human secular sources cannot, because at a certain point ... the sense of your own dignity has certain limits ... and how far it can carry you. A sense of general human dignity is an extremely dangerous double edged thing, because you’ve also got to take into account why people never live up to that. So if you’re moved by the sense of human beings having a wonderfully great potential, faced with actual human material we keep dealing with—that has over and over again flipped over into a sense of anger and contempt for these actual human beings

³¹See Appendix C.

³²Ibid.

³³See *Sources of the Self*, pp.516ff.

... that is part of what motivates us to take over and get it done, control it, treat these people like human raw material.³⁴

What is needed to break out of these bounds is a vision of others which transcends secular beneficence. When Maria Theresa was asked 'How can you manage to deal with these kinds of people lying in the gutter?', she replied, 'They are the image of God.' Taylor admits that is a banal answer, but the difference is that she really felt it, and what it is to feel that is something that takes us beyond the boundaries of the normal motivations of secular beneficence. So in this way there is a need to break the limitations not of the idea of providence, but of the antithesis to this: the notion of secularism that arose out of this providential order.³⁵

This can be seen in some respects as a doctrine of Grace. For Augustine we need the strength of God through his grace to enable us to do good. For Taylor we need these strong moral sources to empower us to ideals such as beneficence, otherwise we are doomed by our own failings, and are simply running on fumes. The idea of the tainted will developed by Augustine also comes into play. Taylor recognises that by ourselves we are in an extremely vulnerable position if we attempt to be motivated merely on the naturalist ideologies of human dignity. Grace in this way is a gift from God, but not one which is external to ourselves, it is intricately involved in our identity as moral agents. In so far as grace entails God giving himself to men so that they can know him and love him, we can understand Taylor's need for something beyond the bounds of secular, 'thin' virtue descriptions as a need for something like the grace of God.

The Radically Reflexive Stance

Following on from this Taylor can recognise an affinity to Augustine in as much as Augustine felt that it was impossible to see God directly. We must catch reflections of Him through the sensual world which point to His Ideas. Taylor is less

³⁴See Appendix D.

³⁵The transition from Providence to Deism and beyond is discussed by Taylor in Part III of *Sources of the Self*.

of a 'Raving Platonist' on this point, but it nevertheless comes across in his reluctance to set up any order as definitive or final. The realm of Nature, however, is less important for Augustine than the realm of the self. Nature does not provide us with direct access to God except in cases of theophany such as Saul's vision on the road to Damascus. Far more than Taylor, Augustine down-plays the role of the senses and the sensual world in seeking after God. This is contrasted with the obvious sympathy that Taylor has with the Romantics who embraced Nature as an important path to reality.³⁶ Augustine's claim is that although we apprehend things through our bodily senses, we make judgements on them within ourselves. 'For we have another sense, far more important than any bodily sense, the sense of the inner man, by which we apprehend what is just and what is unjust, the just by means of the 'idea' which is presented to the intellect, the unjust by the absence of it.'³⁷ So for Augustine then, the principle way to God is not through creation, but 'in' our own selves.

Essentially, Augustine's turn inwards here depends entirely upon God's relationship to man. Augustine was primarily concerned with his own destiny and this was the impetus behind his theology. Striving for self-knowledge was of utmost importance for him. For by seeking the truth within ourselves we find our true self, and it is only in finding our true self that we can find God. Finding our true self means finding our moral purpose, and finding our moral purpose means finding, as Taylor would call it, our 'constitutive good', i.e., God. 'It is in the mind that we discover God as the source of truth which he teaches us there, and which we contemplate there.'³⁸ God in this respect is our 'inner master' and the source of our true being. Unlike the Manichaean view Augustine sees this being as good, and the author and creator of this being is a supremely benevolent God. Our relationship to Him through our will and by His grace is one that we find within ourselves.

Augustine gets to this point by arguing from the existence of the self to the existence of some higher truth above and beyond himself. In doing so he establishes the proto-cogito arguments that later became so important to Descartes' method of

³⁶See *Sources of the Self*, Part IV.

³⁷*Civitas Dei*, XI, xxvii.

³⁸*De Trinitate*, in *The Works of St. Augustine*, trans. and ed. M. Dods, 15 vols. (Edinburgh, 1871-1876) IX, iii,3.

doubt, and indeed to the whole development of modern epistemology. Because it was clear to Augustine that something as ever-changing and finite as the human mind could not have created eternal, unchanging truths on its own, it seemed quite rational to posit an unchanging, eternal being as the origin of these truths. Taylor puts the Augustinian *démarche* in this way: 'I can only understand myself in the light of a perfection that goes far beyond my powers. How is it that this light is cast upon my thought? It is beyond my powers to have produced it myself.'³⁹

Through our minds we have conceptions of these truths through the intimations of the Ideas of God which *are* God, the master within us. Not only is He responsible as the source of eternal truth which our soul ascertains through the mind, but He is also the empowering source of illumination whereby our minds are capable of seeing these truths. 'There is one light which we perceive through the eye, another by which the eye itself is enabled to perceive.'⁴⁰

The act of turning inward in such a way that we perceive a truth beyond ourselves, and thereby understand our true self involves what Taylor calls a 'radical reflexive stance'.⁴¹ This is distinct from the self-consciousness of merely thinking about our own well being or a preoccupation with 'me'. It is radical in that the first-person standpoint is unavoidable. When Augustine speaks of knowing himself, *his* experiences are inseparable from him being the agent of those experiences. A radical reflexive stance has as a main issue 'what it is like to be me'. There can in no circumstances be a disengaging from the intimacy of our own self to a 'view from nowhere.' Something like Heidegger's *Lichtung* is being invoked. In arguing that this is the kind of stance Augustine was taking, Taylor says that 'the inner light is the one which shines in our presence to ourselves; it is the one inseparable from our being creatures with a first-person standpoint.'⁴²

³⁹See *Sources of the Self*, p.141.

⁴⁰Quoted from Etienne Gilson, *Saint Augustine*, p.65.

⁴¹See *Sources of the Self*, pp.130f.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p.131.

Proving God's Existence through Biography

There are two important features of this inwardness that appeal to Taylor. First the idea of Augustine's 'interiore homine' promotes a way of proving God's existence which is largely dependent upon the experiences of the human agent. Secondly, there are certain epistemological assumptions that Augustine's methods entail which Taylor finds very convincing.

Taylor sees the *Confessions* as an extremely meaningful way of talking about God. What is compelling is that Augustine's theology is one where he understands his relationship with God through time. There is a diachronic sense in the *Confessions* of trusting the ameliorating circumstances of his experiences. How this plays out in relation to God in Augustine's life is that he understands where he has come from, and what he has become as getting a firmer grip on reality. In one sense his conversion is what Taylor would call 'an error-reducing move'.⁴³

Augustine does not deconstruct his belief in Christianity in the way a modern rationalist would. He does not seek to find undeniable clues which in turn he can argue are trust-worthy, and which can then be isolated as a defence for the truth claim of believing in a god. This exercise would defeat the purpose of a biography since essential for this kind of foundationalist argument is that it be taken out of time and isolated as an instance. What attracts Taylor is that for Augustine the lived experience, with all its background assumptions, is itself testimony to the truth of where he has come to, and how he stands in relation to reality. Taylor's comment on the *Confessions* is that the story 'has built into it the understanding that these transitions were ... "error-reducing" transitions.'⁴⁴

This kind of 'proof' for God's existence is a valuable one for Taylor, but more as a testimonial than an irrefutable syllogism. In this sense it is not meant to answer the same questions. The value of such an articulation as Augustine's is analogous, for example, to the stories the accomplished doctor shares with the novice intern. The proof of one's experience on the road to God could be valuable for others

⁴³See particularly, 'Explanation and Practical Reason'.

⁴⁴See Appendix A.

who are searching their way along, moving in the same direction. These experiences would have the ring of a kind of lived truth which was not meant to take the sceptic from a standing start and convince him, but was meant to benefit and encourage the ones further away from the goal of the truth. One of the most straightforward applications of this in the community of the Church would be a discipling relationship where the lessons and valued insights are located in the shared experiences of a moral dialogue.

A Shared Epistemology

Secondly, what is important to understand are the epistemological commitments of this kind of belief. In an attempt to 'overcome' epistemology as it has been laid out since Descartes, Taylor develops a view of knowledge whereby one knows reality by being in direct contact with it. He calls this a 'contact' theory (c-theory) of knowledge over and against what he calls a 'representational' theory (r-theory) of knowledge.⁴⁵ An r-theory of knowledge claims that a description of what the subject is aware of can be given without any commitment concerning the object that is known. In other words I should be able to stand back from a belief such as 'I see an elephant in front of me' and describe what I am believing without actually committing myself to the experienced-based belief. For a c-theory, this condition does not hold. Because c-theories construe knowledge in terms of contact with reality, the experience itself is authenticating. R-theories require some kind of neutral criteria gained apart from such immediacy and mistrust such self-authentication. What this means is that we define our epistemic condition not in terms of contact/noncontact with reality, but as our having representations bearing on reality. This requires a stance of disengagement.

⁴⁵A summary idea of his argument can be found in Taylor, 'Overcoming Epistemology', in *After Philosophy*, eds., Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy (Boston: MIT Press, 1987), reprinted in Taylor's *Philosophical Arguments*. Taylor does not use the specific terms 'Contact theory' and 'Representational theory' in this essay. He has utilised them, however, in teaching. For a fuller explanation of the two theories see Appendix H.

The most famous proponent of this is Descartes. In his method of doubt he deconstructs the assumptions of his reality down to the point of its (alleged) foundations. He disinvests himself of all that he considers external to the world of the inner self. Arising out of this is the modern belief in foundational epistemology whereby one goes through a rigorous discipline of checking all the credentials of one's truth claims.⁴⁶

Taylor vehemently challenges the legitimacy of this method. In understanding how we know ourselves and the world, we must recognise that we cannot bring ourselves to a punctual moment and reflect outside of our experiences on whether certain things are true or not. Taylor allows for such reflection in certain instances, but always within a broader framework of space-time continuum, a background of assumed knowledge. He argues that when I say, for example, 'here is an elephant in front of me,' the point of information that I am grasping has the shape that it does only within the context of my whole surroundings. This setting is in turn inseparable from my lived experience which includes how I got where I am and how I am positioning myself within this context. Against this background the elephant can stand out as such. This is Kant's point which Hegel picked up on: things show up as objects, only against the background of a coherent relatedness among other 'representations'.⁴⁷

The contact view focuses on the foreground-background nature of experience. Some things in our experiences are objects of attention, others are not. Using Michael Polanyi's terms, there are some things that are 'focal' such as seeing an elephant, others are 'subsidiary'.⁴⁸ The explicitly known thing can be treated like a definite piece of information, and as such can usually be captured in a representation, e.g., in a linguistic formulation such as a sentence—'I see an elephant'. The tacit information does not phenomenologically have this form. If need be, however, we can redirect our attention and draw out of this tacit understanding further definite pieces of information, but these neither define nor exhaust this background. For example, I

⁴⁶This is discussed in more depth in Chapter 2 as it is related to moral reasoning.

⁴⁷See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A111, A112.

⁴⁸See Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a post-critical philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962) and *The Tacit Dimension* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967).

could step back from the situation where I am looking at an elephant and reflect that I am in the Kruger National Park, and I got there by a safari jeep, and have been there for about two days. I could go even further and consider that I am a human being, that I am on holiday, on the Planet Earth during the year 1996. I am, in Polanyi's term, 'dwelling' in all of these experiences and 'attend from' them to the elephant. This does not, however, tell me everything that I am understanding of my experience at the time.⁴⁹

One of the biggest differences between a contact theory and a representational or Cartesian theory of knowledge is that for the former the significance of things is often primary, what Heidegger calls *ursprünglich* or primordial. What is meant by significance here is first, the place elements of our field of awareness have in a broader whole that they help to define, such as the significance of an elephant which tells me I am on the plains of Africa and not working at my desk. Secondly, it has significance for our purposes or well/ill-being. It is significant that this elephant is harmful to me if he becomes angry and charges.

For an r-theorist these significances are to be understood as inferred from a more primitive or fundamental point of knowledge, i.e., from some 'inner' idea. The more 'direct' data are always going to be neutral in these cases. If it looks as though experience is primordially significant, this is because we are distorted in our reasoning, and we are failing to break things down to their foundational clues. For the contact construal, however, the supposed breakdown of significant objects into a smaller, more basic neutral index is itself an illusion.

One important facet of Taylor's contact theory is a first-person awareness whereby part of the background understanding is that this is an awareness of *my* world. It is what Heidegger refers to as the '*Jemeinigkeit*' of experience. Inherent to the sense of where I am, and how I got here, and how I am placed in a situation is the idea that these experiences are *mine*. This in effect is Augustine's radically reflexive

⁴⁹Wittgenstein's examples in *On Certainty*, eds. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (London: Harper and Row, 1969), make this same point. In leaning on the understanding that my surroundings are stable I am assuming some kind of background consistency. For example, I take it for granted that the world did not begin at my birth, or five minutes ago, etc. At one level this idea is nonsense, but at another level my background understanding implicitly counted this as incompatible with my experience. This background understanding is inexhaustible—the world did not start five minutes ago, but neither did it start five minutes and thirty seconds ago, *ad infinitum*.

stance.⁵⁰ The person at the centre is *me*, the agent. Here is where we can see the common ground between Taylor and Augustine in terms of knowing God and knowing ourselves. For both thinkers the significance of God in our lives is *primary* in that He helps to define the broader picture of our surroundings, and plays a vital role in determining our purposes as moral agents.

There is a parallel here in the role faith has in the Christian life. Because of the epistemological predicament that Taylor recognises in a contact theory, one can never assume absolute certainty about any particular position. Alasdair MacIntyre, holding a similar view, remarks that ‘we are never in a position to claim that now we possess the truth or now we are fully rational. The most that we can claim is that this is the best account which anyone has been able to give so far, and that our beliefs about what the marks of “a best account so far” are will themselves change in what are at present unpredictable ways.’⁵¹ Given this situation there is a strong role for faith to play; however, it is a faith that is essentially ‘unconsummated’.⁵²

From Self to God

The Inward path of Augustine leads him to God, and to the idea of God as transcendent but also as immanent. The notion is one of understanding God through understanding oneself and one’s placement in contact with reality. So Augustine has a contact theory of his relation to the self, and a contact theory of his relation to God. This plays an absolutely crucial role in the justification of everything else. Everything else is mediated.

This becomes clearer if one remembers that Augustine was first convinced of God’s existence not by taking his experiences down to a bedrock of neutral formulae, but by how he understood himself in relation to the reality of perfection. This reality is not only transcendent, but is in direct, unmediated contact with his own self. His

⁵⁰See *Sources of the Self*, p.137.

⁵¹Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science’, p.455.

⁵²See Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*.

argument surrounding this is an inference to the best explanation of things. We would not be able to exist in this whole dimension where the issue of perfection occurs, if it were not there as a reality. The notion of ourselves as imperfect points to the notion of our having a relationship with perfection. We place ourselves in the whole dimension of this. In Taylor's reading of Augustine he sees that the saint's concern was 'to show that God is to be found not just in the world but also and more importantly at the very foundations of the person (to use modern language); God is to be found in the intimacy of self-presence.'⁵³

Understanding God as ultimately significant is very compelling for Taylor. Scientific method which involves finding criteria and breaking them down to their basic neutral index is, he feels, metaphysically futile. Ironically, this is the practice that most philosophers of religion such as Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne engage themselves in when they attempt to create neutral, amoral formulae for the proof of the existence of God through conceptual analysis.⁵⁴ The epistemological framework that Taylor is working within is not answering the same kinds of questions: '... if you want to know how to take somebody from a standing start, in this case someone with no concept of God, to what you want to prove—the existence of God, or a relation to God, then the answer might be, "it can't be done".'⁵⁵ The idea that you can take someone from any point, regardless of their presuppositions, and lead them by undeniable, unarguable systematic steps to God, is implausible for Taylor. This is entirely consistent with the way he sees us reasoning morally.⁵⁶ We all have background significances which cannot be broken down. There is a contact point with reality which in itself is loaded with non-neutral meanings.

In terms of God and the good, these are facts which by their very nature cannot be neutral, they can only be understood if one takes them as read. If seen as just purely neutral they will not be grasped at all. Augustine understood that to be in contact with God was to be in contact with the good, and as such it meant being in contact with a morally charged reality. Taylor contrasts this with Aquinas' Five-ways

⁵³*Sources of the Self*, p.134.

⁵⁴See for example, Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), and Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*.

⁵⁵See Appendix A.

⁵⁶See Chapter 2.

which in some sense all pass through the cosmos, the nature of things. Augustine's proof for the existence of God depends upon his relationship to this cosmos, not on the cosmos itself. In Taylor's own words:

'... the argument of Augustine passes through the sense of perfection. ... the experience of perfection is not coming from me, and therefore something higher exists. That in a way is clearer to me as an articulation of this very strong sense of God, and you articulate that and show why it is so blazingly evident having got there. Why it is so blazingly evident that there is a God.'⁵⁷

An important feature of this for Taylor as he expounds Augustine's theology in *Sources of the Self*, is the moving from the inner self to beyond the self.⁵⁸ This transcendent quality is something that Taylor advocates in his own moral theory. He produces a similar hypothesis to Augustine's at the end of *Sources of the Self* by arguing that implicit in our understanding of the good and our relation to that good is some sense of transcendence, that we need something like God in order to be empowered to do good and to understand our relationship to the good.⁵⁹

Augustine makes the inward step, the first-person dimension, a crucial move towards a higher condition—'it is a step on our road back to God.'⁶⁰ Introduced with this is a new understanding of our moral sources which Taylor finds significant. This attitude is implicit in arguing for a moral ontology in the first section of *Sources of the Self*, and is brought out more fully in *The Ethics of Authenticity*. By arguing against critics such as Bloom, who claim that the modern notion of inwardness and the need for self-authentication is nothing more than a destructive selfish impulse, Taylor convincingly puts forward a case whereby the self's identity needs this radically reflexive stance. The 'malaise of modernity' lies in thinking that it can all stop at this point. It is important for Taylor to bring in Augustine, for Augustine stresses the need for this reflexive stance in order to get beyond the individual. As Etienne Gilson has described the Augustinian soul, it '... passes through itself, so to

⁵⁷See Appendix A.

⁵⁸See *Sources of the Self*, pp.134f.

⁵⁹See Chapter 7 for a detailed account of Taylor's idea of transcendence.

⁶⁰See *Sources of the Self*, p.132.

speaks, on its way to meet the divine master and thus passes through itself only to go beyond.⁶¹

Using Augustine's notion of inwardness to explain the powerful nature of his biographical account John Milbank comes very close to pinpointing the importance of Augustine for Taylor:

'Unlike the stoic inwardness, which does indeed concern pure "attitude", Christian inwardness is opened up by a revisability that accompanies all external modes of expression. Thus, the "depth" revealed in Augustine's *Confessions* ... is the effect of reflections on past actions, of the realisation that they might have been different, that they can be totally re-read in the context of the more general story of the Church, and that he can transform himself in the future.'⁶²

For Taylor there is also a rational progression from the self to a transcendent moral source, which he believes is God. The difference for Taylor lies in the fact that he lays a greater amount of stress on the interaction with other selves in society. So for him there is not merely a single path from the self to God, but from the self to other selves. Interaction in the social sphere does not simply mean one mind communicating with another. There are numerous facets which must be taken into account. We have in common not only our source of the good, but in our society our identities are defined partially by this interaction. This is inescapable for Taylor. It points to the important truth of transcendence, not only divine, but inter-human.

What also surfaces at this point is the substantial difference between Augustine's and Taylor's understanding of how the good exists in society. According to Augustine, while the *Civitas Dei* can endure alongside the *Civitas terrena*, the goods as the Ideas of God are to be found ensconced in the former, not in the latter. Taylor, on the other hand, has more faith not only in the activity of claiming goods from a secular system (for these are often laced with theological implications), but in the philosophical disposition of modernity as a whole.⁶³ In many respects Taylor's

⁶¹Etienne Gilson, *Saint Augustine*, p.76.

⁶²John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell's, 1990) p.291.

⁶³This is a point where Taylor sees himself opposing Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre, in Taylor's view, is of the opinion that we as moderns have been spiralling down since Aquinas into this quagmire of irreconcilabilities. Politically, Taylor sees MacIntyre as having shifted from an early Trotskyian view to one completely void of any hope for political improvement. The value for MacIntyre is in the microcosms of communities. Others have noted this difference—see for example Frances S. Adeney,

political convictions are closer to Aristotle's who sees the *polis* as necessary to substantiating the good.⁶⁴ For example, throughout his activity in the October '95 Referendum in Quebec he was engaged not simply as a member of the City of God, but as a citizen of an earthly *polis* attempting to bring to fruition certain goods within the society of the Canadian people. The pessimism of political Augustinianism is not part of his agenda, nor is the idea of being a *peregrino*, a resident alien longing for the perfect government in the life beyond.

The Ethics of Value over Obligation

While Taylor's political optimism does not have a great deal in common with Augustine or what Taylor has called 'hyper-Augustinianism', some of his metaphysical notions of the good certainly do. Both philosophers, for example, share the conviction that moral theory needs to be firmly grounded in values rather than obligation. Augustine, like Taylor builds his moral theory on a substantive base of values and virtues. His attention to deontic obligations is secondary, and as such is almost always qualified by bringing it to bear upon some higher value.

In arguing against the Kantian/utilitarian versions of modern moral theory, Taylor too argues for a substantive ethic over and above a procedural one. Only then can we understand any notion of the good as intelligible, and see the constitutive good as an empowering source. Augustine, like Taylor, reasons that it is more important to understand what kind of person it is best to be and what things are to be considered good or valuable than to live under a code of obligations. Persons who truly live by the good, and can get close to it, do not even need laws.⁶⁵

⁶⁴Review of *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, *Theology Today*, 48:2, 1991, pp.204-210. See also Appendix G.

⁶⁴See Aristotle's *Politics*, Bk. I.

⁶⁵*De libero arbitrio*, I, xv, 31.

It may be argued that in certain cases, such as in the text *On Lying*, Augustine is focusing on a strict set of policies.⁶⁶ This, however, must be understood in the context of the ecclesiastical situation. In both *On Lying* and in the later *Against Lying* Augustine is dealing with a specific problem within orthodox Christianity. In the latter text he is facing the infiltration of Priscillianists into the Church who were converting Catholics to that heresy. It called for concrete formulations, just as any policy that Taylor would suggest in the realm of Quebec politics would. Augustine seems to be laying down strict legislation when he says that all lying is sin, but he does not do this for the same reason that Kant, for example, makes that claim. For Kant there is a moral imperative, deontically established, against the very act of lying. For Augustine lying is wrong because it goes against the nature of God. He appeals in this apparent obligationist stance to a higher moral standard than man's framework of reason. It is dependent not on the obligation of not lying, but on the very nature of the good. So the issue of lying and falsehood in these texts (as in the *Enchiridion*) is not deontic, but finally ontological.

In one sense while Taylor and Augustine reach an agreement about anchoring our ethical claims in the nature of the good, they nevertheless arrive at this conclusion from opposite directions. Taylor looks to the way we interact, understanding the human agent within modernity. He is of an age of post-Cartesian scepticism when one must study the self because we are taught that this may be all one can be certain about. Augustine never doubted the possibility of a transcendence. He begins with God and then understands from this that we must have an ethic of virtues (what it is good to be) and values (what the goods are in our life). Only by positing a moral ontology can we be consistent with what we know about God from His revealed Word. After all, the first step for Augustine along the path leading the mind to God is to accept revelation by faith.⁶⁷ From this one is led to the inner person, and beyond, to the 'inner master', that source 'which is more intimate to us than our own inner selves.'⁶⁸

⁶⁶See particularly, Frederick Carney, 'The Structure of St. Augustine's Ethics', in *The Ethics of St. Augustine*, ed. W. Babcock (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991).

⁶⁷See F. Cayré, *La contemplation augustinienne*, (Paris: Blot, 1927) pp.216-233.

⁶⁸Gilson, *Saint Augustine*, p.76.

Conclusion

Love and attention are two very important features involved in knowing the good for Augustine. First we must concentrate our focus on the good in order to draw near to it, as we are steered by a light on the horizon. Within his theory of the will Augustine had developed the idea of two loves: the higher love of charity and the lower of concupiscence. Humans have the capacity to either love what is good or love what is evil. In this development one can see Augustine embracing the Platonic idea of turning one's gaze either in the direction of the good or away from it; however, the important dimension of the *will* has been added. Because of the Fall, the human agent is perfectly capable of knowing what the good is, of seeing it as good, and yet turning away and loving evil. MacIntyre remarks that for Augustine 'Evil is somehow or other such and the human will is somehow or other such that the will can delight in evil.'⁶⁹ So unlike Plato, for Augustine what is important is not simply one's knowing and attending to the good, but one's love of that good. We may 'know' what the good entails and still turn away, just as we may know what the right thing to do is, but still choose to do otherwise.

Turning in the direction of the good for Augustine fulfils the order of the soul. It is the direction of reason, the rational choice to make. In so turning we take our proper place in the cosmic order, under God and above the body, (*sub illo a quo regi debet, supra ea quae regere debet*).⁷⁰ Thus if the soul only seeks the good and the beautiful in God, and is good and beautiful itself by resembling the divine ideas which govern it, it will have achieved its proper relationship to the cosmos.

Taylor is much more reluctant to spell this out systematically. At least he is very cautious about attempting to articulate an entire order of the cosmos. Nevertheless, there are echoes of this in his argument for a moral ontology. The stress on teleology is particularly important for him. Inescapable for us as human

⁶⁹See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 175.

⁷⁰Quoted in Gilson, *Saint Augustine*, p.99.

agents is orientating ourselves to a final good. Taylor stresses this kind of moral orientation much in the same way that Augustine stresses knowing our place relative to the good (although without the idea of treating the body as inferior). We cannot deny the existence of certain moral horizons within which we must place ourselves and understand our lives. Knowing where we are in relation to a 'hypergood' affects how we feel about ourselves and our situation: whether we despair because we are far from a good that is meaningful to us, or whether we are encouraged and enriched because we are getting nearer and nearer. Our lives have a sense of proper orientation only in conjunction with some type of good. In our modern society the Good of God has been replaced by various other goods, some traditionally lower, which Augustine himself would have placed under the soul. Taylor, while wanting to embrace many of these goods as legitimate expressions of our moral ontology, still takes the essential characteristics of the spatial metaphor Augustine uses and fleshes out the fundamental truths apparent within this framework.

This emphasis on knowing where we are in relation to the good and seeing ourselves as getting nearer or further away from it can also be traced back to Plato. As was mentioned above, however, Augustine shifts the emphasis in his moral theory. More than simply attending to the good, we must also concentrate on loving it. This feature is crucial for Taylor in understanding the nature of what he calls 'constitutive goods'. For it is by loving these goods that they empower us to do good. Only in our love for God are we able to do good, for He is the source of all goodness.

Taylor in fact defines a constitutive good as one the love of which empowers us to do good. While it is true that we need to attend to the goods in our life, and place ourselves in a moral space with certain goods on the horizon, incomparably higher are certain constitutive goods which by their very ontology are empowering sources. Similarly, God as a Good by His very essence empowers us to do good. This is echoed in the suggestion that 'we love because He first loved us' (I John 4.19). Attending to the good is not enough for either Augustine or Taylor. For we could easily focus on the good and yet despair because of the distance we are from it. We need an empowering grace to propel us towards that good. Equally so we could acknowledge this good and still not love it. James says as much when he writes 'you

believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder’ (James 2.19).

Combining this with the idea of inwardness we can see that for both Augustine and Taylor a turn to the self must also involve situating our identity in relation to the good. At the very root of our person lies God, constituting its nature. He is the ‘master within’. Turning to find our self we find God as its source. To understand who we are, we must understand how we are related to the good, and ultimately the constitutive good of God. In finding our true selves, we are finding God. This occurs in what Taylor has called radical reflexivity, whereby we have direct contact with the reality of God. ‘For it is in this paradigmatically first-person activity, where I strive to make myself more fully present to myself, to realise to the full the potential which resides in the fact that knower and known are one, that I come most tellingly and convincingly to the awareness that God stands above me.’⁷¹ Here the paradox of inward to upward truly comes together. By seeking our own authentication we are led beyond ourselves into the transcendent realm of the divine. ‘Know Thyself’ (*Nosce te ipsum*) has the implicit ingredient of knowing God and knowing one’s place in relation to God.⁷² For Taylor as for Augustine this is inescapable if we are truly to make sense of the domain of moral agency.

⁷¹*Sources of the Self*, p.135.

⁷²*De Trinitate*, X, v,7.

CHAPTER FIVE



Taylor's Catholicism

While the parallels between Augustine and Taylor discussed in the last chapter indicate the extent to which Taylor aligns himself with this important Christian thinker of the past, thus reflecting a thoroughly Christian viewpoint in his own philosophy, this same viewpoint can also be discussed at another level. Taylor as a confessing Christian in the Roman Catholic tradition has a personal vision that remains in the background of much of his philosophy. Yet his personal beliefs and how these have been shaped and influenced remain largely unarticulated in his philosophical writings, and are only alluded to indeterminately. The vitality and profound depth of his own deliberations in the Christian faith, and the theologians he considers to be seminal in this regard, reveal that Taylor has the potential to bring a wealth of significant insight to many of the theological questions concerning the Church in the world.

Taylor acknowledges a theological debt to a certain strand of French Catholicism of the mid 20th century. It is a group which traces its origin to the anti-Jansenist Jesuit line coming from the tradition of St. Francis de Sales, the seventeenth century bishop of Geneva.¹ The two most important thinkers in this respect for Taylor are Yves Congar and Henri de Lubac.² It is perhaps significant for Taylor that these two French theologians were challenging the status quo of the

¹See A. Ravier, *Francis de Sales: Sage and Saint* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988). See also Lucien Ceysens, 'Que penser finalement de l'histoire du jansenisme et de l'antijansenisme?' *Revue d'Histoire Ecclesiastique*, 88, 1993, pp.108-130.

²See Appendix B.

Catholic Church in a radical way within the movement of 'la nouvelle théologie'.³ Both were concerned with the Church extant in the world, and the hierarchical structure of the Church as promoting certain ideological values which they felt were running against the central message of Christianity.

Laïkos and Klerikos in the Early Church

Particularly compelling for Taylor in this respect was Congar's groundbreaking work *Lay People in the Church*, first published in 1951.⁴ The purpose of Congar's work was to carve out a role for the laity in a structure that he argued had traditionally either ignored this group or defined it as inferior. What he wanted to see in the modern Church was a role for the laity as participating in Christ's priesthood by virtue of their baptismal character.⁵

The history of the laity, particularly in the Early Church, reveals a great deal about the criticisms Congar has to make. A recent investigation of this development entitled *Les laïcs aux origines de l'Église*, by the historian Alexandre Faivre, gives an interesting synopsis of how the distinction between layman and clergy came to be formulated.⁶ The term 'lay' or 'laity' is significantly absent from the New Testament writings. Rather, there is the concept of the 'People of God' (*λαος θεου*) to which all members belong in view of the same choice (*κληρος*) made of them by God.⁷ There is a sense of God calling *His* people 'out of darkness into His marvellous light.'⁸ As Faivre notes, 'Le Nouveau Testament ne connaît pas de laïcat mais un peuple, un

³See Joseph Komonchak, 'Theology and Culture at Mid-century: the example of Henri de Lubac', *Theological Studies*, 51, 1990, pp.579-602.

⁴See Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of the Laity*, trans. D. Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985).

⁵I have gained much from the lucid literature review of recent themes concerning Lay People in the Church by Jacques Dupuis. See his 'Lay People in Church and World', *Gregorianum*, 68:1-2, 1987, pp.347-390.

⁶See Alexandre Faivre, *Les laïcs aux origines de l'Église* (Paris: Centurion, 1984).

⁷See for example, Colossians 1.12.

⁸I Peter, 2.10.

peuple saint, un peuple élu, un peuple *mis à part*, un kleros qui exerce tout entier un sacerdoce royal⁹

St. Clement is the first Christian writer to use the term 'laikos' in his *Letter to the Corinthians*.¹⁰ The term in this context, however, is not given any particular function. Clement is not establishing with the designation 'laikos anthropos' any bipolar or antinomic relation between those who were ministering and others in the community at Corinth. There is no sense that laity here is meant to refer to the theological counterpart of the 'clergy' as it has come to signify today. Only at the beginning of the 3rd century does the distinction *laikos-kleros* signify a cordoning off of certain roles in the church community, the former term referring to those who are not ministers. The layperson then begins to be described negatively as *non-clerics*. Faivre argues that before this time such a distinction was not really in existence:

'il est vain ... de demander au Christianisme des origines quel doit être le rôle d'un laïc. Pour les premières communautés chrétiennes, tous les fidèles constituent le lot choisi par Dieu ... tous sont égaux en dignité La différence de fonction ne passe pas entre les liturges et les non-liturges Chez les chrétiens chacun est liturge à sa manière. Pour cette raison il n'existe pas de véritable laïc. C'est un anachronisme de penser que les services rendus par de simples fidèles en dehors du culte sont des "ministères laïques". ... il est impossible de trouver des laïcs dépendant d'un clergé. Il y a seulement des chrétiens et des disciples se réclamant du Christ comme maître.'¹¹

In the 3rd century Tertullian is primarily responsible for bringing about a shift in the laity/clergy distinction. The term 'laikos' in his work is meant to refer to those distinct from the clergy. The laity are assimilated to *plebs* as those other than priests, bishops, and the pope. This is not to assume, however, that the laity was allocated an inferior role in the Church by Tertullian. Their priestly dignity was equal to that of the clergy, and furthermore, they at times could claim identical tasks.¹²

⁹See Alexandre Faivre, *Les laïcs aux origines de l'Église*, p.19.

¹⁰See St. Clement of Rome, *The Letter to the Corinthians*, in *The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and St. Ignatius of Antioch*, trans. J. A. Kleist (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1946) 40,5.

¹¹Alexandre Faivre, *Les laïcs aux origines de l'Église*, pp.56-57.

¹²See particularly *Exhortatione Castitatis*, in *Opera* (Turnholti : Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1954). Two important secondary sources are Robert Roberts, *The Theology of Tertullian* (London: Epworth Press, 1924) pp.188ff., and R. Braun, *Deus christianorum: Recherches sur le vocabulaire doctrinal de Tertullien*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Augustiniennes, 1977).

Following on from this, however, the general trend of the 3rd century became one which understood the laikos as those men (not women) of the Church who were neither bishops, presbyters or deacons. They were conceived as inferior to clerics, their function being to relieve the cleric from all material preoccupations, allowing them to dedicate themselves totally to the service of the altar. At the beginning of the century there were still learned laymen who taught in catechetical schools, but even this ceased progressively after Origen and these functions were henceforth reserved to clerics.

While this remained a distinction of roles, the fact is that it led to a marginalisation of the laity. What developed from the 3rd century was a dispossessing of the People of God through a patriarchal emphasis on the Church's hierarchic structure. Up to the death of Gregory the Great there was a cementing of this ecclesiastical structure separating the laity and the clergy. It is precisely this segregation and marginalising of the laity that Congar attempts to address in *Lay People in the Church*.

Congar and Laity in the Church

One of the most influential articulations made by Congar on the issue of the laity is that an adequate theology of the laity can only be secured in the context of a 'total ecclesiology'. From the beginning Congar recognises that the clergy and laity have too often been set in opposition: the spiritual and the temporal realms. Rather than understanding the Church in this way he proposes that an ecclesiology of the People of God is necessary to undergird any internal unification and reconciliation in the Church.

The two poles of hierarchy and community need to be combined in the priesthood of the Church. This is to be seen in the double modality of participation in Christ the Priest. Ministerial priesthood essentially comes from Christ and not the community, but it nevertheless is ordained *to* the community. At the same time the 'spiritual' priesthood of the laymen is not merely metaphorical. It is a real priesthood

and participation in the priesthood of Christ himself. It is important to see both titles of priesthood 'as being within the one unique priesthood *of the Church* or of the Body of Christ, which is wholly sacerdotal, and not to lose sight of the *organic* character of the priesthood.' Furthermore 'the three sacramental characters of baptism, confirmation and order are participations in one same reality.'¹³

In such a relationship, 'the Church's hierarchical principle is of necessity accompanied by a communal principle.'¹⁴ In comparing this complementary unity to a building task Congar argues that 'all do not take part in the laying of the foundations and in directing the building, but all share in the dignity of the whole, in the functions that compose it and in the activities of its life.'¹⁵ Both the functions of the clergy and the laity are vital to the thriving of the Church body. The Church constitutes an organism 'in which certain functions ensure the existence of the institution and others ensure its perfection, in accordance with the will of God who bestows his gifts and his vocations as he pleases' and the latter two are necessary 'not that the Church as institution may exit, but that she may fulfil her mission to the uttermost and fully carry out her work as the Body of Christ.'¹⁶

In his conclusion Congar's emphasis is on the necessary association and complementarity in the Church's life of communal and hierarchical principles:

'That is a truth that we came upon at the end of all our inquiries, and principally under two forms, namely, the idea that the faithful are the *pleroma* of the hierarchy, and the idea of an association of communal principle with hierarchical principle There we find both duality and unity of subject. Duality, since the hierarchical priesthood and the magisterium are not at all a delegation by the people ... and yet there is a priesthood of the faithful, an infallibility of the believing Church, and an apostolic mission of all. Unity, since ... there is a sense in which the faithful with their clergy form one single subject of worship, of infallible faith and witness, and of apostleship. There is but one Lord, one Spirit, one Body (Ephesians iv, 4-6).'¹⁷

What is needed for this to be realised in the Church is a *total ecclesiology*.

¹³See Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, p.189.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p.452.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p.453.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p.454.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp.455-456.

Congar's Retractationes

Congar's vision of the Church is not without criticism. He himself addresses some of the shortcomings of his work in the 2nd edition of *Lay People in the Church* published in 1964. Specifically, his insistence that the Church's overarching constitution is fundamentally hierarchical, and not democratic, as well as his emphasis on the authoritarian role of the clergy led him to question whether he had clung too much to the recognised categories of classical ecclesiology when writing *Lay People in the Church*.¹⁸

This is an issue that Congar took up later in two essays entitled, 'Mon cheminement dans la théologie du laïcat et des ministères' and 'Ministères et structuration de l'Eglise.'¹⁹ The first study is a critical self-examination of his own contribution to the theology of laity and clergy. Congar expresses here that he sees merit in the way the term 'laity' was described in *Lay People in the Church*, since they are characterised positively as the People of God. His criticism or caveat with his earlier work, however, is that it ran the risk of distinguishing too neatly between laity and clergy. It tended to define ministerial priesthood too much 'in itself', failing to do justice to its functional character and essential relatedness between clergy and laity.²⁰

The point at issue is the structure of the Church in a 'total ecclesiology'. Schematically the Catholic Church has stressed Christ hierarchy Church as the community of faithful. The point that Congar wishes to make, however, is that the Church is not built strictly through priestly actions or 'ministries'. As a reaction to this one-sided scheme the Reformation formulated another which was equally one-sided: Christ Church as priestly community of the faithful ministry. The advantage of this scheme is that it stresses the community dimension of the Church,

¹⁸Ibid., p.xxi.

¹⁹Both can be found in Yves Congar, *Ministères et communion ecclésiale* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1971) pp.9-49.

²⁰Ibid., pp.14-15.

yet it loses the significant meaning of the priesthood as sacrament distinct from baptism.

Congar wants to abandon the distinction between clergy and laity and replace it with one of community-ministries. This formulation takes into account the fact that notwithstanding the specificity of the priestly ministry, ministries in general extend far beyond this specific vocation. To indicate this it is necessary to start with the Church as community which avoids the danger of hierarchy interceding between God and the People. The two alternative linear schemes above are replaced by Congar with one where the community will appear as 'the all-embracing reality within which the ministries, even those instituted and sacramental, take their position as services of precisely that which the community is called to be and to do.'²¹

In Congar's structural formulations the community originates from Christ and his Spirit and clearly stands out as the enveloping reality within which all the ministries are at once shown to be contained and for which they are destined. Lay ministries and priestly ministries are no longer defined in isolation or in contradistinction from each other. Instead they are 'viewed organically within the reality of the community.' In such a scheme it is no longer the layperson that needs to be defined, but the priest. In other words the meaning of the priestly order must be discovered, not by starting from the hierarchy but from the reality of the People of God.²²

Congar's second study 'Ministères et structuration de l'Eglise,' returns to the same themes, particularly the inadequacy of the traditional emphasis on the hierarchical infrastructure as 'instrumental cause' of the Church. This is a concept that Congar, himself, felt he gave too much support in the past. Such an emphasis he claims can lead to the notion that the ecclesial hierarchy is an autonomous body, a reality prior to and above the community of the actual *ecclesia*. The danger of this is that this kind of absolutising of the clerical ministries lends grist to the mill of a clerico-centric conception of the Church. The priest is sometimes considered as a 'super-Christian' and the bishop a 'super-priest'.

²¹Ibid., p.19.

²²Ibid., pp. 21-23.

Congar thinks that the remedy to this is to look to the New Testament description of the Church where there existed a variety of ministries built upon the common reality of the Christian community under the inspiration of Christ and the Spirit. What must exist in the Church in order for her to fulfil God's design are services and ministries which the Spirit raises within the midst of a particular community in order that she may fulfil her mission as Church sent out to serve.²³ In the retrospective essay Congar contributed to *Vatican II by Those who were There*, he asks the question whether the concept of *societas inaequalis, hierarchica*, has been superseded by the Council.²⁴ The conclusion he comes to is that the hierarchy is still present in the Council and post-conciliar Church, but it is no longer pivotal to the whole ecclesiology. Instead it is in the context of communion. Thus the hierarchy falls into perspective.

Congar's Legacy and Taylor's Affinity

Congar's influence in Catholic theology has been monumental. As Fergus Kerr remarked, 'his contribution to the Church is already a matter of history.'²⁵ The role of the laity that he has articulated has found a place in many of the important movements of modern theology from the Community of the People of God to the grassroots movements in Liberation Theology. Leonard Doohan in *The Lay-Centered Church*, picks up Congar's emphasis on the variety of spiritual manifestations in the Church:

'... There is no such thing as a spirituality of the laity. There is only the one unique Christian spirituality; but, just as this was lived out in a variety of ways over history, so it is lived out in a variety of ways today by laity, priests, and religious The concept of vocational

²³Ibid., pp. 48-50.

²⁴See Yves Congar, 'Moving Towards a Pilgrim Church', in *Vatican II by Those who were There*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986) p.141.

²⁵See Fergus Kerr, 'Review of *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*', *The Tablet*, 238:7488, 1984, pp.41-42.

spirituality is good and should be maintained, but the vocations are many, and the spiritualities will be varied.²⁶

Basic Church Communities (BCCs) and Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) movements have looked to Congar's conception of the laity with the intention of applying this concept to grassroots liberation theologies in an attempt at redefining the Church. The theologians Leonardo Boff and Marcello de Carvalho who are involved in these respective movements quote Congar at length in regards to the structured community Jesus instituted as the initial community of Christians:

'Jesus instituted a structured community, a community in its entirety holy, priestly, prophetic, missionary, and apostolic, with ministries at its interior: some freely aroused by the Spirit, others bound by the imposition of hands to the institution and mission of the Twelve. A linear diagram, then, must be replaced by one in which the community appears as the all-embracing reality within which the ministries, even those that are instituted and sacramental, take their position as services of precisely that which the community is called to be and to do.'²⁷

Like Doohan, the theologian David Powers has concentrated on the diversity of the first Church community, but with the specific desire to apply this plurality to our own predicament.²⁸ There are in Africa and Latin America different ways of being in Christian Community, ways which call for a change in the approach to ministry. 'Community self-identity decides the way ministry develops.'²⁹ 'Today also we have to look to the community's experience of Christ and of the kingdom in order to discern the charisms and ministries of the Church.'³⁰

This of course brings to mind the priority in Congar's work of the community as that Body ushering from Christ and the Spirit. For if the life in Christ is expressed in concrete relations with others, then the Church does indeed need a great number of diverse expressions. These diverse ministries do not, however, spring from the

²⁶See Leonard Doohan, *The Lay-Centered Church* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Winston Press, 1984) p.123.

²⁷See Yves Congar, *Ministères et communion ecclésiale*, p.19. See also Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis. The Base Communities Reinvent the Church* (New York: Orbis Books, 1986), and Marcello de Carvalho Azevedo, *Basic Ecclesial Communities. Scope and Challenge of a New Way of Being Church* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1987).

²⁸See David Powers, *Gifts that Differ: Lay Ministries Established and Unestablished* (New York: Pueblo Pub., 1980)

²⁹Ibid., pp.103, 106

³⁰Ibid., p.107.

hierarchical structure of the Church, but from the variety of experiences and contexts involved in the community. Thus in order for the Church to fully realise its potential it must embrace a kind of universality. It must stitch into its pattern an inter-ecclesial multiculturalism.

This articulation of the Church as an all-embracing universal Body is very compelling to Charles Taylor. Congar's theology has been influential in Taylor's own personal vision of the Church as community. The idea of taking away the boundary between the bishop and the layman, that which eventually came to be a vital part of Vatican II, has contributed to Taylor's own ideas of universality and unity in the Church.³¹ Like Congar, Taylor views the schematic formulation of the Catholic Church emerging from Christendom as constricting. This sets up boundaries which he feels denies much of the richness of Christian potential. Likewise, however, he sympathises with Congar's critique of the Reformation structure as being equally one-sided. It too denies features of Christianity such as the monastic orders or the Sacraments, which should be allowed to co-exist with other doctrines of the Church. Taylor, looking to Congar, desires that both 'Catholic' and Reformation traditions be embraced under one Christianity. He seeks an ecumenical unity which will erode the established hierarchy of Christendom, yet still remain in communion. With such a vision the influence of Henri de Lubac's seminal work *catholicism* is clear.³²

De Lubac's 'Catholicism'

Both Congar and de Lubac hold to a view which understands a multiplicity of spiritualities communing together in the Church. Taylor in reading both of these theologians embraces this idea with great sympathy. 'catholicity,' he says, 'is the attempt towards a church in which the whole range of Christian spiritualities—those that we now imagine, those that we have not yet imagined—can coexist.'³³ This

³¹See Appendix G.

³²See Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism* (London: Burns & Oates, 1950).

³³See Appendix B.

notion of ‘catholicism’ Taylor has developed most succinctly through his reading of de Lubac.

Catholicism was a milestone in the circle of *la nouvelle théologie*. This movement was specifically addressing what de Lubac saw as the twofold failure of the Church: contentment with a habitual, traditional, conservative faith, without spontaneous creative dimensions, and the restriction of Christianity to the merely private realm. Thus he introduces *Catholicism* by saying that there are two kinds of Christians—those who withdraw from the social sphere, and those who, in the modern world, work within the world and its laws seeking to extract the good they contain.³⁴

Père de Lubac’s argument begins by establishing the premise that we as human beings are united in nature. This is posited theologically rather than sociologically or anthropologically. Images of the New Testament (Christ’s Body, the Bridegroom) as well as the doctrine of creation leads de Lubac to conclude that ‘the same mysterious participation in God which causes the soul to exist effects at one and the same time the unity of spirits among themselves.’ Following on from that he quotes Gregory of Nyssa who argues that ‘the whole of human nature from the first man to the last is but one image of Him who is.’³⁵

For de Lubac the unity of humankind does not spring from genetic similarities, nor does it derive from a psychological make-up that we all share to some degree. What it depends upon is the concept of God. Unity of the human race both spiritually and socially is established by the fact of the Incarnation. Christ as the needle sews up the gaping tear in humanity. Two ideas follow from this. First, unity as that which stems from God is a good to be highly valued and pursued. Secondly, if unity ultimately happens in God and through God, disunity is a result of not being in God. This is not restricted to the unity of individual and God, but refers also to the unity of mankind as a whole. Being unfaithful to God is at the same time a disruption of the unity of mankind.

³⁴See Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism*, p.xiv.

³⁵*Ibid.*, pp.2-3.

Thus redemption for de Lubac entails being unified once more with God and our fellow humans. It is a redemption that he stresses is not exclusive, it is for the whole world. Just as Christ was the whole man, so he came for the entire human race. As Clement of Alexandria comments, ‘the whole Christ, if we may be allowed the phrase, the total Christ, is not divided: for he is neither barbarian, nor Jew, nor Greek, nor man, nor woman, but the new Man, wholly transformed by the Spirit.’³⁶

In one sense the Church represents this unification. *Καθολικος* means exactly that: universal or all-embracing. Père de Lubac is quick to point out, however, that this universalism is not a geographically stipulated one. It is not that the Church has followers throughout the world, or that so much of the earth’s population is an official member. Fundamentally, the catholicism of the Church has nothing to do with geography or statistics. ‘Like sanctity, catholicity is primarily an intrinsic feature of the Church.’³⁷

In the fullest meaning of the word the Church brings beings into existence and gathers them as a Whole. ‘Humanity is one, organically one by its divine structure; it is the Church’s mission to reveal to men that pristine unity that they have lost, to restore and complete it.’³⁸ The unity of the Church implies a universalism with two dimensions: it is a cosmopolitanism and a catholicism. There is a great diversity in the Church all gathered into one polis. Within this community the very structure of the institution is the mysterious union brought about by Christ.

There is present in this concept a paradoxical dualism which is related to the term ‘Church’. On the one hand this refers to the visible institution with its present congregational members. On the other hand it connotes the invisible Body of Christ. Père de Lubac wants to stress that the Church is not merely the former. That is, it is not simply a confederacy of assemblies or a group accepting a particular ideology, which was only brought into existence after the community of the first believers. The traditional idea of the Church is linked with the Hebrew concept of ‘Qahal’ which in the Septuagint is translated *Εκκλησια*, i.e., a general assembly of all citizens. This is

³⁶See Clement of Alexandria, *Protreptic*, XI, 112, 3, ed. Claude Mondésert (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1949).

³⁷See Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism*, p.14.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 16.

not the de facto number of people in the Church at any given time. On the contrary, it is a transcendent reality, that which Congar alludes to as the enveloping reality out of which all ministries develop.

On the other hand, this is not to be interpreted as equating the Church with the invisible mystery and ignoring the sociological phenomenon of the People of God. This 'worldly' physical dimension is equally important. The 'reality' involves the paradoxical union of visible and invisible Church. It is to be seen as a group of people with a common purpose which can be studied and whose practices can to some respect be explained sociologically. At the same time, however, the Church is a vast spiritual organisation, unseen even by those who are members. It is known fully only to God. This has eschatological intonations attached to it even though it is not referring to the future exclusively. The way John Milbank has expressed this idea in de Lubac is that the 'narratological dimension insists on the tension between history and eschatology.'³⁹ The Church viewed soteriologically is not merely a means, but a goal as well. It is a goal, however, that is not to be realised within this earthly history. Père de Lubac is not attempting to argue for a Utopian solution, yet he is still taking very seriously the historical progression of the Christian Church as it is lived out. So the Church is 'at the same time both the way and the goal; at the same time visible and invisible; in time and in eternity ...'⁴⁰

Taylor's 'Catholicity' and Spiritual Travelling

Taylor in his own articulation of the Church finds this notion of 'catholicism' very compelling. This is particularly true when faced with the difficulty of dogma in a Church which is supposed to be all-embracing. The problem of dogma is one where the denial of some particular idea or opinion excludes the holder of this opinion from participating in the Church. Alternatively, certain people may strongly argue for

³⁹See John Milbank, 'An Essay against Secular Order', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 15, 1987, p. 204.

⁴⁰See Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism*, p. 27.

convictions contrary to the dogma that the Church considers necessary, and in order to be embraced by the Church they must deny their own beliefs.

This is certainly one way of approaching the issue of dogma versus ecumenism; however, Taylor understands it from an alternative angle. The criterion he sees to be relevant in such a situation is *catholicity* as he understands it from de Lubac and Congar.⁴¹ If by catholicity we mean an attempt by the Church to embrace the whole rainbow of spiritualities, even those not yet imagined, as well as those traditionally considered ‘orthodox’, then Taylor argues there is a need to ‘reframe the issues’, as it were, so that conflicts within the Church are not necessarily put into opposition to each other in any kind of either/or scenario.

One example he calls on to illustrate how this should not be done is his own definition of ‘heresy’, which, he points out, originally meant nothing more than choice. The choice in an heretical situation, however, is the kind of absolute choice of two diametrically opposed positions:

‘In a way I think the reformers, Luther, Calvin and so on (this may sound sectarian) are paradigm examples of heretics, because they had something very valid, a certain spirituality of the Bible for instance which is tremendously valid. But they felt they had to present that in a way that put a torch to the monastic vocations, understanding of the Mass, The Sacraments. They sort of torched the house down in order to have this room, and they are not by any means alone in this kind of error. The Catholic Church itself tends to do the same thing the other way around. It tends to torch out the Biblical spirituality in order to preserve its other stuff, and the goal of *catholicity* is the goal of continually understanding how these things properly really are.’⁴²

Taylor’s idea of heresy brings to mind Paulo Freire’s description of political dogmatism. Both the Liberal and the Conservative set up an absolute choice of either their own position or one which is diametrically opposed to it:

‘Each ... as he revolves about “his” truth, feels threatened if that truth is questioned. Thus, each considers anything that is not “his” truth a lie. As the journalist Marcio Moreira Alves once told me: “they both suffer from an absence of doubt.” The radical, committed to human liberation, does not become the prisoner of a “circle of certainty” within which he also imprisons reality. On the contrary, the more

⁴¹See Appendix B.

⁴²Ibid.

radical he is, the more fully he enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he can better transform it. He is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. He is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them. He does not consider himself the proprietor of history or of men, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he does commit himself, within history, to fight at their side.⁴³

Meeting the people and entering into dialogue with them beyond the 'circle of certainty' is incorporated in Taylor's 'catholicity'. How we go about achieving this is not clear, nor does Taylor want to say that it should be. It 'takes a great deal of spiritual maturity, of growth and prayer, and not just trusting one's first-off logic. ...' if we are to succeed in this endeavour.⁴⁴ In a situation of mutual understanding the correct role for dogma is not one which rigidly defines the borders of Christianity. Rather, Taylor thinks dogma is important as an over-arching protection against conflict. 'What dogma does is keep the doors open, in that there are Catholic dogmas like the Sacrament of the Mass which are very important if the issue is closing that chapter by simply taking an extreme Calvinist [view of it] as some kind of commemorative rite.'⁴⁵ The aim of dogma is to ensure that the rich breadth of Christianity can thrive in the Church. The Church must protect 'certain definitions in order to keep the whole gamut of spiritualities alive and that also must be very careful about not foreclosing on others.'⁴⁶

Taylor envisions a Church where the Evangelical can live with the Trappist monk in respect and love, where the former does not say to the monastic order 'You must believe X, Y, and Z in order to be truly Christian', and where the latter does not say to the former, 'You must adhere to the strict discipline of our way in order to follow God.' The People of God as a unified body must at the same time embrace their own spirituality while recognising the differences in others, so that they can understand that though a particular path is *their* way, it is not other people's way. Concerning the Trappist order Taylor remarks that:

'... they're not saying there isn't anything good in talking, but there are certain temptations and certain difficulties and certain distractions

⁴³ Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1972), pp.18-19.

⁴⁴ Appendix B.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

for *their* spiritual path that they need to cut out. So they accept this very rigid discipline in which these things are cut out. And that is how it should be. I do not think ... it's not like the reformer's attitude, because it's not my way ... I do not think that one would knock that aside. At the same time what's interesting and what's good is that they're not saying that it would be unchristian not to do this, and if you don't do this you're a heretic. They're saying this is a very important way and it's really important for us and if anyone wants to join us fine; but it's not for everybody and we will pray for and offer our spiritual guidance for anyone who wants to follow another path. It's that kind of coexistence which I think is real *catholicity*, where one can recognise that this is a way but not necessarily *the* way ... and there is a sense of the Gospel that is not narrowed into that form ...⁴⁷

It is within this kind of catholicity that one gets a full experience of the Gospel, of recognising the other as truly valuable and acknowledging their way as important. One way that Taylor thinks we can promote this catholicity is familiarising ourselves with other Christian spiritualities through a process of spiritual travelling. Stepping outside the cramped view of our own experiences opens us up to the vast number of ways of 'being Christian'. Travelling both through space and time in this spiritual journey can acquaint us with the large swatch of Christian spiritualities that are in the world:

'The more you have a feel for a larger number of these spiritualities the more you can recognise new ones or not fail to recognise them, or misrecognise them, or just shut them out. And the more we narrow ourselves into a certain set, that we develop in our particular bit of the Church, the more we are likely to take the shotgun and just shoot from the hip at whatever comes along and looks even mildly different, and shoot it out of the water.'⁴⁸

The advantage Taylor sees in our modern situation is that we are more in tune with the experiences of other societies and peoples, simply by technological advances. It is no longer the case that we are isolated in a tiny community whose insularity promotes a single line of thinking. The disadvantage of this 'global' opportunity is that in exploring other spiritualities it may be much easier than before to lose our bearings. Inasmuch as spiritual travelling means going beyond the

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid.

boundaries of our own faith, it can also include a degree of unfamiliarity. Exploring in this way can lead to anxiety through disorientation. This is, nevertheless, no argument not to pursue this journey. It merely points out the need for faith. Faith both looks ahead to seek understanding and anchors us to where we have been.

Other Religions

What comes to the fore in this investigation is the question about other religions. It is one thing to advocate a healthy acceptance with regards to other Christians who share some fundamental belief which enables them all to live in the community of Christ. It is something completely different to consider such a spiritual travelling as an inter-faith dialogue. With this issue Taylor and de Lubac seem to part ways.

With de Lubac's emphasis on the Church comes a certain undeniable prejudice against other religions. It may be the case that de Lubac is wanting to unify the entire human race through the Incarnation of Christ, and it may also be the case that he acknowledges the importance of the uniqueness of all in this process, yet the approach he has towards Buddhism, Islam, etc. is fundamentally distinct from how Taylor thinks we should as Christians approach them.

Initially it must be said that de Lubac's formulation of Catholicism with regards to other faiths seems to be truly all-embracing. He acknowledges that the religion of others is not like an outer garment that they can simply discard in order to pick up Christianity. All of their customs, social practices, intellectual pursuits, and traditions are coloured by their religious belief. One should not expect them to jettison all of this as no longer valuable. In a moment of true insight for the regard of the other de Lubac argues that 'it is not possible that what has lasted so long as the life-blood of whole races should not be worthy of respect from some point of view.'⁴⁹

In this credo de Lubac demonstrates the need to be willing to learn from those around us who do not share in our faith. In such a way he is convinced that the

⁴⁹See Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism*, p.147.

Church is able to grow spontaneously, eliminating whatever is unwholesome without stamping out the individual human contribution to this faith. There is a twofold desire present: to 'entertain whatever can be assimilated and to prescribe nothing that is not of faith.' The way to proceed in this is not through intellectual, instrumental reason which sets about determining the most successful way of saving the lost. Rather Love alone makes this possible.⁵⁰

Advocating such a response out of love is something Taylor finds immensely compelling. He, like de Lubac, uses the example of the modern Jesuits going into China. In this situation a group of Christian's travelled to a place completely off the map of their own spiritual experiences and immediately admitted their own incomprehensions and misgivings. In this way they were able to educate themselves to become, in effect, Chinese. Taylor, unlike de Lubac, however, does not think that it is necessary to work with the ulterior goal of conversion in mind, at least not in every situation. He does agree that God's revelation through Christ is a particularly special situation and that the Gospel should be preached; however, it is not clear in his mind that all should be included in 'the Church' in the same way that Henri de Lubac argues.

False Religions

While respecting traditions and alternative cultures and beliefs, Père de Lubac nevertheless is much more focused on bringing the other into the Body of the Church. The difference between this and Taylor's idea is made plain in their individual concepts of false religions. For de Lubac a false religion is one which may have some kernel of the truth in it. It may simply have strayed from the truth, and as such it is not a system of beliefs which is necessarily completely wrong. In this category he would place Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam as great faiths which are nevertheless false religions since they have not quite hit the mark of the truth.⁵¹

⁵⁰Ibid., p.151.

⁵¹Ibid., pp.147ff.

Taylor on the other hand wants to be far more empirical about the process. His notion of false religions does not include the idea that anything that is not Christianity is *ipso facto* a false religion. Approaching another faith empirically in Taylor's mind means noting whether it tends to nourish a certain kind of 'spiritual fullness'. He does not think, necessarily that there should even be a clear indication of this: 'We shouldn't say "If we can't solve this problem we've made a terrible mistake."' Rather what is needed is a spirit of humility and faith: 'It's not clear exactly what God's doing. He's not relating it to us, but maybe we are not expected to understand it.'⁵² On the other hand if we understand it and disagree, if we recognise the essence of the other faith and oppose it, Taylor still feels that there is something to be gained, namely that we have recognised that there is something 'spiritually great there that isn't our way.'⁵³

The immense benefit from this kind of approach for Taylor is that it wards off a dangerous kind of prejudice which affirms our own spiritual bias through a superficial and destructive method:

'... there's a lot of very facile affirmation of one's own tradition which is based simply on negative judgements about others. So for years people who believed in God thought that people who didn't must be somehow morally questionable, and Christians thought that Jews were just simply fixated on the Law, and that Buddhist and Hindus were just totally 'other-worldly'. We all have these stories whereby our own faith, our own position, is shored out by what turns out in examination to be ludicrously uncomplementary. And when you liberate yourself from those crutches, then the way to carry on with one's own faith is for it to be a *live* one for itself, as against one of these contrasting moves. So I think it's a very important enlivening and liberating move to liberate ourselves from these denigrating stories that we've told about others.'⁵⁴

For Taylor the false religions are ones which do not fit with the idea of the Gospel as he understands it in terms of the Christian message of love. The cult of Jones at Jonestown is a supreme example. The lack of spiritual depth and greatness in such an extreme case just seems to be self-evident on empirical investigation. This

⁵²See Appendix C.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

is distinct from de Lubac's assertion that the Church is the only 'holy ark of salvation' and to hold the truth is tantamount to being Christian. Anything else is false.

Taylor wants to advocate a humble agnosticism when approaching other religions. The way he sees a distinction between his own view and Père de Lubac's is clear when he says,

'naturally as a Christian I want to share that kind of corporate view of de Lubac and others, but there's something absolutely indispensable being done in God's name by the Buddhist. But it would appear that there are other elements of that that I don't understand, and I would just respect without believing that I have to understand them all We need an agnosticism at this point, and I think honestly, in spiritual humility, we have to accept and articulate that that's where we are.'⁵⁵

Catholicity and the Pluralism of Modernity

It is not clear from this how far de Lubac would agree with Taylor. Certainly in terms of the history of the Church's oppression and the need to break out of this Taylor seems to indulge a lot of the ideas of both Congar and de Lubac. Père de Lubac insists that in so far as we equate Catholicism with Christendom we cannot help but see it as an imperialist force which has for centuries silenced the spiritual voices of other nations and cultures. This is a judgement with which Taylor wholeheartedly concurs.

As a Christian Taylor testifies to a love/hate relationship with modernity. There is a paradox of conflicting values when it comes to the modern situation of the 'post-Christian' era and how we as Christians ought to live within it. Moving beyond the realm of Christendom in one respect means that individuals no longer acknowledge the importance of our spiritual potential, and the need for a transcendent dimension. Contrasted with this, however, Taylor argues that in some

⁵⁵Ibid.

respects the move away from Christendom has been an emancipation. It has opened up for us new ways of realising the good, even new ways of being Christian.

One quite evident way that this manifests itself is the freedom which comes through the break-up of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This not only affected the structure of the Church leading to the Reformation, but running parallel to this was the injection of the sacred into the secular realm, the affirmation of everyday life.⁵⁶ Suddenly vocations and callings arose quite distinct from the monastic order and the ministries of the Church. Congar's concern for a theology of the laity naturally comes to mind. For he considers the *métier* of the laymen to be caring for created things. In their care for the created they discover the uncreated. Paul Loeffler has summed up Congar's view as follows:

'the world in the sense of things themselves is not only taken seriously, as a reality in its own right, but it is regarded as a part of God's realm in which He can be served as well and certainly not less than in the Church. The lay vocation is no longer subordinate to that of the priest. Rather it attains its own theological meaning, relevance and glory.'⁵⁷

Taylor understands this 'breaking open of Christendom' as an emancipation in so far as Christendom is understood as a restrictive society involving the use of force. It is not simply a matter of clergy controlling laity, but of Church controlling belief. Two of the goods of modernity that Taylor wants to support unreservedly are authenticity (the idea that one must be true to one's self) and the politics of recognition (the idea that everyone should demonstrate equal respect to all).⁵⁸ One interpretation of the end of Christendom that he thinks is plausible is to see it as a move towards a universalism of a kind which promotes such modern goods as the unconditionality of human rights:

'... the rejection of religion allowed the development of certain understandings of human rights as universal and unconditional way beyond what they ever could have achieved in the context of Christendom. So in wrenching them out there are gains and there are losses. There's gains because the idea went through a development

⁵⁶See *Sources of the Self*, pp.211-302.

⁵⁷See Paul Loeffler, 'Bonhoeffer versus Congar', *Frontier*, 7, 1964, p.130.

⁵⁸See *The Ethics of Authenticity*, and also *Multiculturalism*.

that we have to approve of, that we have to consider plausible. On the other hand, in taking it out of that context, you lose a whole vision of why it's so important, and nothing I think as good has been substituted since.⁵⁹

The fact that Taylor sees gains as well as losses in this historical process is important, for he is still very critical of much of the 'lousy fruit' which modernity has yielded. One of the losses that he sees in this process of embracing a more universal concept of human rights, which includes ideas such as the relief of suffering and the preservation of life, is that in moving beyond Christendom, modernists have left behind not only the dead skins of the hierarchical structure, but also the tremendous wealth of spiritual understanding. The strength of this impoverishment is clearly detected in our modern predicament.

Taylor's stance towards modernity is one that is manifestly in line with the way he understands the dynamics of the Christian Church. The Christian's approach to the ideologies of modernity should correspond to the way he travels on his spiritual journey. Indeed, this should be considered a significant part of the journey itself (something both Congar and de Lubac are advocating). On the one hand we cannot appear triumphalist and say 'The whole escape from our tradition of Christendom was a mistake.' By doing so we are completely disregarding an entire realm of goods that we as Christians should instead be advocating. On the other hand, we cannot approach modernity uncritically and refuse to recognise where it fails to speak the truth.

For example, Taylor notes that the modern misunderstanding of authenticity leads to certain inconsistencies. Without any transcendent dimension, the concept of being one's self as a true individualist is impossible. What one notices about those individuals who are trying to be 'themselves' in any kind of non-conformist fashion is that they all look terribly similar. Saints, on the other hand, are not similar at all 'because there is something working in their lives which is much bigger than they are.'⁶⁰ The critique that Taylor makes is that 'the world goes dead if you only believe in individual freedom, because the important differences between doing X and doing

⁵⁹See Appendix D.

⁶⁰Ibid.

Y ... just disappear.’⁶¹ In discussing Taylor’s work, Stanley Hauerwas expounds this point in regards to the extreme emphasis on the affirmation of everyday life in modern culture. He argues that when we create societies in which the value of each individual is thought to be equal, the extraordinary disappears. The desperate problem with this is that ‘the extraordinary comes in the form of extraordinary people as well as events.’⁶² So that with the case of Christianity, in cancelling these out we are cancelling out the central figure of our faith and the event of the Incarnation.

Conclusion

Clearly there is a strong affinity that Taylor feels towards both of these theologians who were challenging certain assumptions of the Catholic Church during the post-war period. Not only have they had an impact on his own personal conception of the Church and Christianity, but Taylor has also found the challenges that Congar and de Lubac make to the Catholic Church particularly relevant to the political and moral arenas as well. Congar’s theology of the laity finds a voice in Taylor’s formulations on modernity and the goods of universal equality. Henri de Lubac’s idea of *catholicism* has profoundly affected not only Taylor’s faith in finding a need for pluralism within the Christian community (something he also picks up from Congar), but also the conviction that we as Christians must approach other faiths humbly, with a certain amount of critical agnosticism, in an attempt to learn from their ways. This too he applies to modernity—learning to understand it as the Jesuits understood the people of China.

There is no criterion for this except ‘catholicity’. Taylor is clear in suggesting that we should not expect our spiritual journeys to be easily laid out. The comfortable and facile affirmation of a provincial faith is a temptation that he thinks we should avoid. There is the danger of losing our bearings in such a spiritual exploration of other faiths in the sea of modernity, but any other kind of Christianity would not be

⁶¹See *ibid.*, and *Multiculturalism*.

as deep nor as rich. We must finally come alongside Taylor as he navigates with the tradition of Congar and de Lubac and ask the question, 'What is the purpose of this spiritual journey—is it to be comfortable, or is it to travel some way towards ultimate truth?'

At the same time it is clear that for Taylor we cannot accept the signposts of another religion without critical interpretation. While one should not be tempted to judge with pre-established criteria, the 'story ... in the New Testament is the one that is normative.'⁶³ In our faith and our tradition the Gospel gives us an indication of what truth is about. If a tradition or belief goes against the message of love in the Gospels it must be questioned. Finally, it is important to establish a balance of humility and integrity; '... we're not left without guidelines, but you can't reduce it to some exact type of criteria. There are going to be new kinds of calling all the time, which may sound in some ways strange in relation to the previous system.'⁶⁴

⁶²See Stanley Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological engagements with the secular* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994) p.173.

⁶³See Appendix E.

⁶⁴See Ibid.

PART III



Taylor and Christian Ethics

CHAPTER SIX



God in Taylor's Philosophy

Taylor's moral theory has sought to combat much of what can be labelled 'secular' philosophy emerging from the Enlightenment. Through his formulations he has shown how detrimental, and even impossible it is to work with a naturalist or projectionist theory of morality. Furthermore, he has argued against procedural ethics and opted instead for a moral ontology which sees us as agents in some relationship to the good. By breaking open the wall of naturalism and secular morality which has been hemming moderns in for so long, Taylor has in effect created a gap that many would want to run through including the Christian theologian. We have also seen that Taylor himself has very strong theological ties, not only in his philosophical articulations coming from Augustine, but in his affinity to the anti-Jansenist current of theology which understands the importance of diversity in the Church, and which seeks to emphasise the role of the laity within the community of God. Taylor, both as philosopher and Christian thinker, indicates that certain theological influences are seminal in his own perusals. He insists, however, that though he may have theological inclinations which spur him on in his arguments, he is nevertheless meticulously careful to ground his moral theory in philosophy rather than a presumption of God or anything like transcendence. We are left to determine

whether there is in fact room for God in Taylor's moral theory, and if so whether his theory can be considered a 'Christian ethic'. In pursuing this question it becomes clear that there are certain aspects of Taylor's theory that correspond with a Christian ethic, and certain ideas evoked in his work that are vital for proceeding in moral formulations as a Christian.

God as Source

It cannot, however, be assumed unquestionably that Taylor's theory has room for God. Taylor comes to this conclusion in *Sources of the Self*, and certainly as a confessing Christian he would have reason to. But merely because Taylor submits that there is a need for God does not mean that God has a place in his moral theory. Nor does it indicate that one can interpret his theory sympathetically, in the light of Christianity. The assertion, after all, may be unfounded. Taylor has been criticised by theologians for not putting God into his theory as a central player. The theological ethicist William Schweiker in his critique of *Sources of the Self* maintains that there is a gap between the way Taylor has propounded our modern moral predicament, and the situation as it concerns theologians and those involved in Christian ethics. He argues that while Taylor discusses what is entailed in our moral reactions, he does not seem to talk about what or whom we are reacting against. This he sees as crucial in the theological arena since he argues that theological ethics is concerned with the reactions to and dependence on God in the midst of our moral lives.¹

The objection by Schweiker is not a strong one. Indeed, he later seems to have changed his mind about Taylor and his significance in this realm.² It does,

¹See William Schweiker, 'The Good and Moral Identity: A Theological Ethical Response to Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*', *Journal of Religion*, 72:4, 1992, pp.560-572.

²In William Schweiker, 'Radical Interpretation and Moral Responsibility: A proposal for Theological Ethics' *Journal of Religion*, 73:4, 1993, pp.613-637, he makes the point that what he calls 'radical interpretation' in moral responsibility is something that is necessary for moral self-understanding, and furthermore in order to do it correctly this entails theological claims. He sees Taylor as an important voice in the philosophical arena confirming this truth.

however, offer a point of reference from which one can begin to understand how it is that God plays an important role in Taylor's theory. Taylor certainly does not explicitly argue that God should have a place in our lives. What he does show is how God *could* have such a place in the moral sphere. If by having a reaction to God in our moral lives Schweiker means moral intuitions which arise from scripture or experience, then Taylor does have something to say about this. As far as dependence on God is concerned, Taylor finishes *Sources of the Self* by raising this very issue as a hunch that he has concerning God as a source. He is clear in submitting that God is the most cogent way of understanding the good in our lives. For Taylor God is the Best Account.³ Thus dependence on God is crucial for Taylor's theory as a constitutive moral source. At the same time, Schweiker recognises that Taylor is not attempting in *Sources of the Self* or in any of his philosophy to prove the existence of God. Nor is he giving a completely rational argument for the necessity of theistic ethics, since the nature of the human moral agent as constantly self-interpreting forbids this kind of epistemological exercise.⁴

During the development of the 'historical' argument in *Sources of the Self*, Taylor reveals distinct ways that God plays an important role as such a source. Most apparent is the fact that God is the beginning of our history as selves. We in the West are theistically grounded in that many of the goods in our lives originate in the developmental narrative of theology and the Judeo-Christian sphere of values. It is Taylor's claim that secular humanism 'arises from a mutation out of a form of that [Judeo-Christian] faith.'⁵ So that to the extent that we can still trace the origins of our moral sources, historically at least, there is a need for God in the equation.

One might want to counter this by saying that such a place for God is far from the central role that Christian ethics would want to allot to Him. For as such a source, God can be brought under the umbrella of sociological explanation and 'naturalised' as a mere event in the history of ideas. Put another way, Taylor in one sense is saying that we cannot understand our selves without reference to our religious history. While this is a claim that many would see as contentious, it is also one that can be

³See *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, p.226. For an explanation of Best Account see Chapter 2.

⁴See William Schweiker, 'The Good and Moral Identity'.

interpreted in one of two ways. If we take a weak interpretation of this we come up with the same objection as above. That is, our religious history is based on happenstance. A transcendent being of divine nature is involved, yet it is merely accidental that we have developed ideas around and nurtured this being as a source of many of our modern goods. If Taylor is simply to be understood in this way, we can translate what he is saying about moral sources into the reductive language of sociological explanations. By doing so the transcendent dimension of our religious past can be explained away while we cling to the various goods coming out of Christendom. Many attempt to neutralise the history of our moral sources unwittingly or not, but we need to question whether in fact Taylor does this.

God as Constitutive Good

It is clear that this is exactly what Taylor is not saying. The interpretation of religious history must be in the 'thick' sense for it is this 'thinner' interpretation that he argues against. Not only is secular humanism linked to the theology of the past by developing from it, but he wants to argue that modernity is still utterly dependent upon it even now.⁶ Many have recognised that this is what Taylor argues for in *Sources of the Self* and have attacked him for it, accusing him of being dogmatic, naive and over-confident.⁷ Critics realise that this leads to the deeper, more indispensable role that God has to play as a moral source. For not only is He a player in history, but throughout history He is a constitutive good from which strong evaluations concerning the human originate.

Through his moral argument Taylor has shown how the goods in our lives act as moral sources. The roles that goods play in our lives are of two kinds: they show us what it is good to be and what it is good to love. Some of these goods are

⁵See *Sources of the Self*, p.319.

⁶See *ibid.*, Chapter 25.

⁷See for example Jonathan Glover, 'God Loveth Adverbs', *London Review of Books*, 12 (22 November, 1990) pp.12-13; Bernard Williams, 'Republican and Galilean', *New York Review of Books*, 37 (8 November, 1990) pp.45-47; Quentin Skinner, 'Who are "we"?: ambiguities of the

incomparably higher than other goods. They are those hypergoods which help to define the more common life goods. In this sense God can clearly be seen as a good helping to define other goods. His being, His character can show us what such goods as justice, mercy, and benevolence mean.

At the same time, Taylor points to three important goods which are sources in a way beyond merely giving meaning to other goods. They are constitutive in as much as they by their very nature are good. Here we come to the truly 'thick' picture of God as a moral source for which Taylor wishes to argue: the God of creation who not only saw that what He had created was good, but in seeing it as good, He at the same time was constituting its goodness. This way of understanding God as a constitutive good means that as a moral source He effects what He sees. Taylor describes such goods as 'features of some reality—it can be God, or the universe or human nature—which make sense of the goodness of the goals and norms we adopt, and the better understanding of which may inspire us to encompass these goals, or fulfil these norms, more fully and heartily.'⁸

Taylor's historical assessment comes up with three important constitutive goods: God, Nature, and the inner self. When Taylor is criticised, for example by David Braybrooke, for only allowing just one moral source (God), Taylor strongly reacts insisting that this is a complete misinterpretation of the entire work. 'Wow!' he exclaims, 'I thought the entire book [*Sources of the Self*], and much of what I have written in recent years, fairly cries out against the enterprise of reducing ethics to a single track, whether we are talking of criteria or sources.'⁹ The influence and attraction of Aristotle's ethics can be seen coming into play in advocating a plurality of goods, but for the Christian this raises a difficult issue. This could be construed as Taylor being overly ambivalent, indeed secular about our moral sources. To embrace many goods, among them God, indicates that there is a danger of seeing God on a par with other values in our lives as part of an evolutionary process. Particularly in

modern self', *Inquiry*, 34, 1991, pp.133-153; Martha Nussbaum, 'Our pasts, ourselves', *The New Republic* (9 April, 1990), pp.27-34.

⁸See Taylor's 'Reply to Commentators', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54:1, 1994, pp.211-212.

⁹See 'Reply to Braybrooke and de Sousa', *Dialogue*, 33, 1994, pp.125-131. See also Taylor's essay 'The Diversity of Goods' in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*.

Taylor's historical development, one could envision God with no real moral import and claim that before the 18th century it just *happened* to be the case that this external deity was important for the self and in defining who we are. This ceased to be so when the moral agent turned inward and claimed reason as a source during the Enlightenment or Nature during the Romantic movement. A reality which was very much part of our lives up until the Scientific Revolution has been prescinded by the rational mind and the creative imagination, and there is no question concerning one being better than the others.

A Good amongst goods

An alternative way of approaching this objection is to examine Taylor's assertion that there are certain constitutive goods with no theological import whatsoever. For example, Camus' *La Peste* is clearly a constitutive good for Taylor. It is an inspiring narrative where the main character shows a way of responding with courage to the human condition outlined in the plague he is fighting against. The novel gives us an account of an empowering good which helps us to better understand the values in human existence without having recourse to anything beyond the human condition. There is an 'ultimately lucid solidarity with human beings in their suffering unsupported by any of the comforting illusions of religion or teleological history.'¹⁰

The way Taylor expounds this as an unqualified constitutive good brings into question for the Christian ethicist the uniqueness of God as a source. Taylor is vague concerning this, and it may be that he goes to extremes in dialoguing with critics to bend over backwards for the atheist, where elsewhere he remains quite lucid and convicted about the necessity of a theological dimension.¹¹ One must look for

¹⁰See Taylor's 'Reply to Commentators', loc. cit.

¹¹See for example, *Sources of the Self*, p.342 where Taylor asserts that 'it is a question of fact (a) whether our best, most illusion-free interpretation does involve an acknowledgement of the significance of human life, and (b) whether this significance is best explained in a quite non-theistic, non-cosmic, purely immanent-human fashion. The answer to (a) seems to me unquestionably 'yes', but

reasons behind the words in order to understand what Taylor is trying to communicate by embracing many different goods while at the same time attempting to hold a unique position for God.

Looking carefully at some of Taylor's distinctions will indicate that there is no inconsistency at work here. Taylor is essentially a Christian who acknowledges a plurality of world beliefs. Unlike the era of Christendom, we live in a period where atheists really do exist and must be brought into the dialogue. Their moral sources must be accounted for. Taking one line of interpretation one could argue that when Taylor says he does not want to streamline our ethics into a single source, he is coming from a standpoint which is very critical of those Christians who seek to re-establish some kind of Christian world order akin to that of the Middle Ages.¹² This is certainly one of the real dangers he sees in the Christian Church of modernity—once one commits oneself to the belief that we need to return to Christendom, there is no other alternative but to jettison all the goods which were not ensconced in that ideology.

At another level, and perhaps he would say a higher level, Taylor sees the naturalist sources of ethics as inadequate, as attempting to do good works without the motivation. If one is serious about moral virtues and doing good, then one must have recourse to something like God who can empower us through His being Good. So in some sense he is speaking of God on two different levels. Firstly, there is the God as a source equated with Christendom and the hierarchy of goods established therein. This is the tradition of the Church which so much of the Enlightenment efforts have fought to overthrow. This Taylor clearly does not want to encourage, and in many ways he sees the move away from this as an emancipation. On the other hand, however, there is the God as mysterious creator, as Divine Love, the constitutor of goods such as dignity and respect, without which Taylor thinks modern individuals cannot do good, or at least sustain the good. This is the God of whom so little is known for Taylor, of whom so little can be said. He avoids systematic theology in his work, and perhaps one of the reasons he does not call himself a theologian is the

my hunch is that the answer to (b) is 'no'. It all depends on what the most illusion-free moral sources are, and they seem to me to involve a God.'

anchored belief in the utter mystery of God. His task as he sees it is not to attempt to propound the depths of the character of God, and as such God is something utterly unfathomable, one has inklings, rare insights into His character from what we know of this world and from what we experience in our prayer lives and observing the lives of saints.

As such Taylor sees all kind of possibilities for the good and for self-fulfilment outside of the traditional orthodoxy of the Church. This is his idea of 'Catholicism'. At times he suggests an eschatological approach to this plurality of goods, that goods in our lifetime which seem to clash because of sin in the world will, in the perfect actualisation of God, be reconciled: 'In the restored order that God is conferring, good doesn't need to be sacrificed for good. The eschatological promise in both Judaism and Christianity is that God will restore the integrity of the good.'¹³ What Taylor finds peculiar and inconsistent in certain atheist critics, however, is the lack of understanding they are willing to put forward in relating to thinkers like himself who are Christians holding to the value of certain spiritual beliefs.¹⁴

God as Best Account

Another way of reinforcing the inescapability of God in Taylor's theory is to examine a particular criticism made by Stanley Hauerwas and David Matzko.¹⁵ They argue that Taylor is separating moral standards and the higher goods in his theory, and while most moderns agree about the standards, they do not agree about the sources. These, as has been noted, vary: God, Man, Reason, Nature, etc. The shortcoming of Taylor's explanation according to Hauerwas and Matzko is that he 'does not entertain the question whether a standard like dignity is actually a different

¹²See Chapter 5 and Appendix G.

¹³*Sources of the Self*, p.219.

¹⁴See particularly his reply to Quentin Skinner in *Inquiry*, 34, 1991, pp.237-254, where Taylor laments that, 'The paradox is that the last members of the educated community in the West who have to learn some lesson of ecumenical humility are (some) unbelievers.'

¹⁵See Stanley Hauerwas and David Matzko, 'The Sources of Charles Taylor'.

standard depending upon whether the source to which you appeal is Reason or God.’¹⁶ In answering this criticism one can see just how fundamental God is for Taylor’s theory.

For Taylor does argue for a distinction of goods in this way. In fact the relations they hold to various moral standards as such indicates for him that there are significant shortcomings in constitutive goods which do not have some theological reference. Reason alone, as an anthropocentric good will not do. There is no relationship between reason and the human agent whereby we can say that the former is being empowered by the latter to do what is good. One has recourse to the notion of dignity, or universal justice, etc., but finally there is no motor which propels us to seek these goods in our lives. Because of the nature of God, however, we can find a source for our self through which, and by virtue of being loved by that source, we are empowered to love the good and seek the good.

In one sense there is a space in Taylor’s moral theory which needs a constitutive good. This is the whole purpose of describing it as a moral ontology. He recognises that the contemporary unbelieving and ‘post-metaphysical’ world has such constitutive goods, only now they are products and features of the human condition, of human potentiality. His argument is that moderns need to own up to the fact that there is this void. Michael Morgan sees this as theologically significant in itself:

‘ ... Taylor’s account of articulacy, historical examination and practical reasoning serves as a vehicle of retrieval for religious discourse and religious commitment. For articulation makes an issue of human-centredness, of any suppression of objective sources of value, and of any form of reductionism to human capacities, beliefs and so on. It retrieves a receptivity to non-human goods and moral sources. Insofar as God is one such good, indeed the supreme one among those of Western culture, Taylor’s account re-establishes the plausibility of the divine-human relationship as primary for our moral experience.’¹⁷

While Taylor admits that the naturalistic constitutive goods will fit this gap, God fits it better in the long run, in the same way that a temporary plug in a radiator

¹⁶Ibid. , p.287.

¹⁷See Michael Morgan, ‘Religion, History, and Moral Discourse’ in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, p. 54.

will work for a while, but is not the best solution. A more permanent remedy is needed. God is essential for us to live by our deepest convictions. This feature of the relation between morality and human well-being is one of the most compelling theological imports of his theory. 'High standards need strong sources. This is because there is something morally corrupting, even dangerous, in sustaining the demand simply on the feeling of undischarged obligation, on guilt, or its obverse, self-satisfaction.'¹⁸ Without such strong sources, morality can quickly spiral into hatred and contempt for those one wants to help. It is Taylor's conviction that one needs the 'acute sense of human beings as objects of love, objects of God's love that you can participate in. That empowers you in a way that the ordinary human secular sources cannot ...'¹⁹

Proposing a Christian Ethic

Here one can see a clear place for God in Taylor's theory, not merely as an historical source closely tied to our moral narrative, but also as an empowering and inescapable Being who by loving us empowers us to love the good and seek what is good. Finding this place for God in Taylor's philosophy is the first step in determining how this theory can be applied to Christian ethics. It develops a space in which one can explore the possible contributions that Taylor as a Christian thinker has to make to this discipline. One way to continue with this examination is to understand more clearly what one means by proposing a 'Christian ethic'.

It is not the intention here to give a full account of what it means to be involved in an ethic that is Christian or to attempt an exhaustive definition of a Christian moral theory. Epistemological limitations and sympathy for a critically pluralistic stance dictates that one cannot hope to give an ostensive definition of the phrase 'Christian ethic' in the same way that one cannot expect to create a list of necessary and sufficient criteria. Certainly one factor which effects this endeavour is

¹⁸*Sources of the Self*, p.516.

¹⁹See Appendix D.

the nature of God himself. For as Christian ethics is in some way linked to God, and as God is impossible to define exhaustively, so one cannot hope to give an account of Christian ethics completely and unreservedly if this theistic dimension is to play a part in any interpretation.

With this assertion I am arguing as James Gustafson does that ‘for theological ethics the base point that ought to be most decisive is the interpretation of God and God’s relations to the world, including human beings.’²⁰ For my purposes it is more fruitful to attempt to find some inescapable features of Christian ethics—those characteristics which I would argue the Christian needs in order to develop a moral theory with room for God. This is not meant as a definitive list of attributes, but rather a springboard into discussing how Taylor’s moral theory can contribute to our modern understanding of Christian ethics. Two very important features of Taylor’s moral critique which (I would argue) are essential for any Christian ethic are (a) the need for some kind of transcendent claims on the self, and following on from this (b) the grounding of our moral intuitions in an ontological reality which goes beyond the distinction of fact and value. A brief historical argument will help to articulate this further by revealing how these features came to be eclipsed in modern critical thinking.



The Theological Background to Secularity

²⁰See James M. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) II:144.

Philosophical moral theory today seeks to suppress much of what the Christian cannot deny has a place in our moral order. The realm of the spiritual, the transcendent, and an understanding of humanity as defined by God are features of a theological anthropology which have been upstaged by a secularism emerging from the 18th century. Ironically enough, this development can be traced back to a period before the Enlightenment when certain theological values were closely linked to the rise of modern scientific thought.²¹

Puritan Reformers in the 17th century sought to redress what they saw as the imbalance of the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Catholic Church by emphasising the spiritual dimensions of the common life. Developing out of this is what Taylor calls the 'affirmation of everyday life', which sought to embrace the goods of work, family and production.²² As Taylor outlines the development of the self in society from the pre-Socratic *honour* ethic to the Platonic hierarchy of goods adapted in Christendom, the emphasis on production, work, and the family

'flies in the face of what were originally the dominant distinctions of our civilisation. For both the warrior ethic and the Platonic, ordinary life in this sense is part of the lower range, part of what contrasts with the incomparably higher. The affirmation of ordinary life therefore involves a polemical stance towards these traditional views and their implied elitism. This was true of the Reformation theologies, which are the main source of the drive to this affirmation in modern times.'²³

Thus the sacred is not found in a specific activity which is segregated from everyday life. Rather it is to be found in the vocation of living an ordinary existence. 'The highest life can no longer be defined by an exalted *kind* of activity; it all turns on the *spirit* in which one lives whatever one lives, even the most mundane existence.'²⁴ The ordinary life is to be hallowed not by linking it to the sacramental life as in the Catholic tradition, but by living it out in a certain way. So the Protestant

²¹John Milbank gives an exhaustive account of the development of secular thought arising from Christendom in *Theology and Social Theory*.

²²See for example, *Sources of the Self*, Pt. III.

²³*Ibid.*, p.23.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p.224.

Reformer Joseph Hall argues that 'God loveth adverbs; and cares not how good, but how well.'²⁵ William Perkins makes the same point:

'Now the works of every calling, when they are performed in an holy manner, are done in faith and obedience, and serve notably for God's glory, be the calling never so base The meaneness of the calling, doth not abase the goodnesse of the worke: For God looketh not at the excellence of the worke, but at the heart of the worker. And the action of a sheeheard in keeping sheep, performed as I have said, in his kind, is as good a worke before God, as in the action of a Judge, in giving sentence or a Magistrate in ruling, or a Minister in preaching.'²⁶

This emphasis on seeing the sacred in the everyday world of creation became a powerful catalyst for the Scientific Revolution. Francis Bacon, for example, came to the Philosophy of Science from a Puritan background which understood the world as a realm given to the human agent for his own gain. From this assumption the Baconian programme established a theme whereby science was considered to be a tool for the benefit of mankind.²⁷ In so doing Bacon had shifted the emphasis in science from the Aristotelian notion of contemplation to that of productive efficacy. The Puritan doctrine of humans as stewards in God's creation played a major role in providing a hospitable environment for this shift.

With this in mind one can understand the theological impetus, however questionable, that eventually grew into a mechanistic interpretation of the universe. First came the idea, biblically grounded in the creation story, that God had made us stewards in the world and we were to tend and dominate this realm as part of his plan. Scientific probing in such a light can be seen as an essential part of discovering how we should be using this creation properly. In the wake of this doctrine came the idea that instrumental reasoning was tantamount to following the will of God. A shift occurred in our understanding of the cosmic order of things from one where unity lay in the ultimate nature of reality to one which was set in motion by God through providential order. The strong doctrine of Providence adopted by thinkers such as

²⁵Quoted in Catherine George and Charles George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation 1570-1640* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961) p.139n.

²⁶Ibid., p.138.

²⁷See Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum Scientiarum*, I. 73. See also Christopher Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).

Locke and most famously enunciated by Leibnitz eventually squeezed God out of the cosmic picture, first as an impersonal Deity acting in the world (17th century Deism) and finally as a variable which in scientific terms was deemed unnecessary to explain the cosmos.

Because the Scientific Revolution for thinkers like Locke was also primarily concerned with the nature of epistemology and the function of knowledge, this came to have a critical effect on the moral predicament of the human agent. Locke's idea of 'knowledge claims' developed from Descartes' disengaged self. Like the French philosopher of the early 17th century, Locke adhered to the primacy of knowledge obtained from removing one's consciousness out of the sphere controlled by the unreliable flux of experience. His 'punctual' self could be extracted from the natural world through thought experiments to a point of certain, foundational knowledge.²⁸

Secular Morality on the Rise

The importance that this has for moral thinking is primarily related to the question of where morality is grounded in the realm of human experience. In the move from Locke to his successors of the Scottish Enlightenment, there is a further push to internalise reality, i.e., to find knowledge and the rational within ourselves rather than beyond in some Aristotelian concept of the cosmos. Furthermore, there is a parallel agenda in the moral realm to locate the essence and origins of morality within. Building on the moral theory of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson understood moral intuitions as sentiments.²⁹ Rather than anchoring what we understand to be moral thoughts and judgements in something beyond ourselves, something transcendent, Hutcheson argued that such thoughts were feelings stemming from our

²⁸See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975) and J. L. Mackie, *Problems from Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

²⁹See Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations upon the Moral Sense*, facsimile reproduction of the third edition, 1742 (Gainesville, FA: Scholars Facsimile Reprints, 1969). See also Shaftesbury, *An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*, in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times* (London, 1711; New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964).

own benevolent nature. There is a special moral faculty—a moral sense—which apprehends *sui generis* moral values or duties. Thus in effect by internalising our moral sources Hutcheson had naturalised morality. The questions of good and evil were seen as dependent upon desires and aspirations.

Once this internalisation takes place there is a clear temptation to projectivism. We see the world as pregnant with meaning and values only because we are projecting our feelings of values onto the tabula rasa of a neutral cosmos. The dividing line is drawn here between the realist who understands some kind of transcendent reality, and the internalist, or what Taylor would call naturalist, who would seek to explain various phenomena such as moral intuitions in reductivist terms of cause and effect.

The naturalist can have no truck with any kind of theological ethic since God as a moral source has been deflated, explained away in scientific terms. Furthermore, we as human moral agents in the mechanical universe are seen as microcosmic instruments or machines. Paul Tillich sums this up by saying that ‘Knowledge either has resigned itself to failure or has transformed the world, aside from the knowing subject, into a vast machine of which all living beings, including man’s body, are mere parts.’³⁰ Naturalist theories attempt to place us in relation to other processes in this larger system thus defining the self as part of a holistic mechanism. Even to ask the question ‘What are our moral sources?’ is invalid, for it assumes that there is some kind of external, ontological relevancy. What we are left to work with are desires which can be indexed to even more basic impulses or psychological motives which subsequently ‘explain’ why we value certain ways of living and certain features of human existence. Such explanations depend primarily upon instrumental reason. What has emerged in the discipline of secular moral theory is a circle of beliefs which focus on the right procedures in ethics. Morality has become an exercise in calculation: determining what action would bring about the greatest happiness to the greatest number of individuals (utilitarianism) or deciding what maxim could be universally applied in every situation (Kant).

³⁰See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) I:168.

One can see in this development how far history has carried moral philosophy away from any notion of a theocentric morality. There is a clear parallel here between the forces that have been suppressing any articulation of a Christian ethic in modern philosophy, and the epistemological catalyst that Taylor clearly sees as responsible for modern naturalist theories of morality coming out of the 17th century. Taylor, by arguing against such an approach to knowledge and our understanding of the world and experiences, brings to the surface many inescapable features of what it means to live a morally significant life. We cannot explain human agency—our value-spheres or life's fulfilment—with an Enlightenment vocabulary without leaving undefined many of the dimensions of reality that we take for granted. There are unavoidable features of our constitutional make-up beyond the reach of scientific accountability and foundationalist epistemology.

These arguments by Taylor have brought mixed reactions in the philosophical arena. Some, like Bernard Williams, are quick to point out these fundamental flaws in any kind of naturalist account of ethics, but do not follow Taylor in advocating a moral theory which gives a place to God. Others, like Quentin Skinner, are convinced that Taylor's Christianity is clouding his judgement and that his arguments must therefore somehow be invalid. Certainly Taylor's philosophy has had a significant impact on theology. His ideas about identity in community, for example, which invoke the necessity of the other, even the other from outside, have contributed greatly towards our modern understanding of ecumenical religious life.³¹ For the Christian seeking to develop a moral theory, however, it is evident that many of the positive elements in Taylor's argument, such as seeing a need for transcendence or anchoring our moral sources in an ontological dimension, are ones which can give us significant insight into some the fundamental issues of Christian ethics. William Schweiker is clearly one who recognises this and sees in Taylor an opportunity to articulate further what it means to have a theological ethic, one in which 'the self and moral space are reinterpreted through the articulation of the divine claim on life as

³¹For example, although he himself does not like to be identified as a Communitarian, it is quite a prominent peg-hole for Taylor to be fitted into, and it is certainly apparent that he has a great deal of sympathy for many of the Communitarian ideals. See Taylor's 'Replies and Rearticulations' in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, p.250.

that which constitutes the moral space in which we live.’ Schweiker goes on to agree with Taylor that this kind of relationship with God ‘empowers and also radicalises the intentionality of the moral life, for it means apprehending all of existence not only as good but also as holy ground.’³² What this means in the realm of Christian ethics is that we must look first to the divine for the definition of humankind, so that ultimately it is a *theological* and not a *philosophical* anthropology that the project is building upon. Defining the realm of the human moral agent in such terms naturally implies a need for transcending the self and grounding our moral sources in God as the *ontic logos*, whose very being constitutes our moral dimension and breaks down the barrier between fact and value.

³²See William Schweiker, ‘The Good and Moral Identity’, p.571.

CHAPTER SEVEN



Transcendence and Ontology in Christian Moral Theory

Two key metaphysical concepts of Taylor's moral theory which are particularly relevant to Christian Ethics are transcendence and ontology. These two ideas are intricately linked to each other particularly in the way Taylor understands the moral agent as defined by the transcendent. There are other ways of understanding transcendence, however, and it is not necessarily a theologically loaded term. While this chapter begins with an examination of these more 'secular' and less controversial interpretations, it soon becomes clear that for Taylor's moral ontology, transcendence is a radical concept in a post-Enlightenment ethos. Furthermore, his understanding of ontology and defining the moral agent through a transcendent source is one of the most cogent formulations for Christian ethics in modernity.

The Polysemy of 'Transcendence'

'Transcendence' is a difficult term to define. Although in a theological context and certainly in the realm of this investigation it has metaphysical connotations, this is not always the case. So arguing that there must be room for transcendence in Christian ethics is not necessarily a contentious claim in a secular

academy. There is, for example, the notion of transcendence of the self to an objective standpoint, moving beyond to a 'view from nowhere'. This has become a powerful idea in today's scientific civilisation. Knowledge obtained foundationally from a disengaged viewpoint is a standing aspiration in many disciplines, including some theologies.

Similarly one can understand transcendence in terms of meaning 'beyond the everyday'. This is particularly the case in Aesthetics. Philosophers such as Arthur Danto ask the question 'What is it that makes a work of art thrust itself beyond the categories of the mundane?'.¹ The concepts surrounding representation take issue with the idea of transcendent meaning. So Nelson Goodman in *Languages of Art* asks one to compare the curve of an electrocardiogram with the identical gradient in a print depicting Mount Fujiyama by Hiroshige. One of these is a work of art which has a transcendent meaning, the other is a simple graph. Goodman and others analyse this meaning in art in an attempt to pin down the specific characteristics of this transcendence.²

This is not, however, what Taylor means by transcendence, nor is it the only way of understanding transcendence in art. Art as a vehicle for transcendence can refer to the capacity that art has for spiritual import. Theological Aesthetics as a subcategory in Theology is gaining wide recognition as an important pursuit in the study of transcendence.³ Ronald Hepburn, for example, has often written about the significant relationship between the aesthetic and religious experience. His investigations are primarily an attempt to define some underlying common characteristics between these 'kinds' of phenomena.⁴

While this understanding of transcendence points to a metaphysical dimension in art, it has often been championed by atheist and agnostic thinkers who

¹See Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

²See Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968) p.229.

³See for example, George Pattison, *Art, Modernity, and Faith* (London: Macmillan, 1991), John Dillenberger, *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities: The Visual Arts and the Church* (London: SCM Press, 1986), and Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, ed., *Art, Creativity and the Sacred* (New York: Crossroad, 1984).

⁴See for example, Ronald Hepburn, 'Time-Transcendence and Some Related Phenomena in the Arts' in *Wonder and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984).

nevertheless remain convinced that art has tremendous power to affect the human agent in ways not available in other experiences. Anthony O’Hear argues that art has the potential to give insight into the ‘real’ behind our encounters with phenomena. In taking issue with Proust’s essay *Chardin and Rembrandt*, he asserts that there is a kind of transcendence in Chardin’s still lives which is immensely evocative, yet paradoxically immanent. The reality in these ‘mundane’ paintings is the value of human existence. Proust on the other hand, distinguishes between the *beauty* of Chardin’s work and the *transcendence* of Rembrandt’s: ‘from Chardin we had learnt that a pear is as alive as a woman, that common crockery is as beautiful as a precious stone.’ But Rembrandt’s reality is something beyond this. His work is at times a signpost to a higher plane of being. O’Hear is agnostic about this kind of reality and wary of this kind of transcendence. ‘Religion,’ he warns, ‘would take us all too quickly from the human to something we cannot envisage or articulate at all. In so doing, it all too easily downgrades and wipes away the human.’⁵

Perhaps the most articulate atheist on this subject in recent history has been Peter Fuller. After moving beyond a Marxist philosophy, heavily influenced by John Berger, he began to realise that art without any spiritual dimension was fundamentally doomed.⁶ As transcendence was seen to be lacking in most modern British painting, Fuller argued that it was characterised as mediocre and nonsensical. In *Theoria* and his last collection of essays, *Peter Fuller’s Modern Painters*, he gives us the picture of someone who is unable to come to terms with the materialism and secularism of modernity.⁷ His friend and art critic Hilton Kramer eulogises his journey in this way:

‘The vision of a world without *grace* was almost unbearable to him, and, in lieu of the religious faith that he had lost, he looked more and more to art for some spiritual equivalent of the transcendence he still

⁵See Anthony O’Hear, ‘The real or the Real: Chardin or Rothko?’, *Modern Painters*, 5:1, 1992, pp.58-62.

⁶In his philosophy Fuller had taken up Ruskin’s formulations as they were pronounced in the latter’s defence of Turner and the spirituality of Nature. See Ruskin’s *Modern Painters*, 5 vols., in *The Library Edition of the Works of John Ruskin*, eds. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London: G. Allen, 1903-12) vols.III-VII. See also Peter Fuller, *Theoria: Art and the Absence of Grace* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988).

⁷See Peter Fuller, *Theoria*, and *Peter Fuller’s Modern Painters: reflections on British art*, ed. John MacDonald (London: Methuen, 1993).

hungered for. When the Marxist view of art proved sterile in this respect, he floundered for a time until he found in Ruskin's special combination of aestheticism, social idealism, and unorthodox spirituality, the foundation upon which he could launch a revisionist approach to the problems of art and life.'⁸

One modern visionary whom Fuller felt had something important to communicate in his work was the artist Cecil Collins. Collins, working as a neo-Romantic heir to Blake and Palmer, had built into his definition of art the idea of metaphysical transcendence. Art must be related to the absolute and the only absolute is God.⁹ Through art we can reach a reality beyond, a source through nature and God, (figs. 5 and 6). 'Art sets free an instant of vision, things seen in their archetypal essence in the sacrament of image and colour.'¹⁰ This is a transcendence in art that Charles Taylor also sees as essential both as a way of understanding our true selves and as a way of arguing against a naturalist interpretation of moral sources.

Transcendence, Art, and Modernity

In tracing the links between the development of the self and certain movements in art, Taylor finds an important ally in the epiphany of modernism. He sees many of the artists of the 20th century reacting negatively to the limitations of instrumental reason, the break-down of community and the encroachments of scientific thought. In their work there is a striving to overcome this view of the world, to see behind it the spiritual significance of our creative imagination. Within this is a tension which Taylor is quick to expose. For while the modernist lives in a world entirely determined mechanistically, he nevertheless wants to have recourse to the good, or the true, or the beautiful. Taylor argues that this leads to an internalising of one's epiphany.¹¹ The artist seeks the transcendent good, but within himself. There is a turn to subjectivism, yet a paradoxical longing for the transcendent, a turn away

⁸See Hilton Kramer, 'The Importance of Peter Fuller', *Modern Painters*, 6:2, 1993, pp.48-50.

⁹See Cecil Collins, *The Vision of the Fool and Other Writings*, ed. Brian Keeble (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1994) p.14.

¹⁰See Judith Collins, *Cecil Collins: A Retrospective Exhibition* (London: Tate Publishing, 1989) p.37.

¹¹*Sources of the Self*, pp.456ff.



5. Cecil Collins, *Daybreak*, 1971, Private Collection



6. Cecil Collins, *Landscape with Hills and River*, 1943, Private Collection

from the self to something higher. 'So where the original Romantics turned to nature and unadorned feeling, we find many moderns turning to a retrieval of experience or interiority.'¹²

This explains the move away from instrumental reason, but it does not necessarily lead to the transcendence—or 'anti-subjectivism'—that Taylor finds in writers like Pound, Eliot, Rilke and Proust. Where this emerged was in the reaction modernists had against the Romantics' view of the self as an inner nature. They rejected the idea that harmony with nature brings restoration and redemption. Instead their turn inward was not to find an inner subjective nature to relate to Nature as a whole. Rather, the turn was to take them beyond the individual self as it is usually understood. Indeed, Taylor argues that we are shown fragments of experience which call into question our ordinary notions of identity. They challenge what we assume to be normative human characteristics. This kind of epiphany challenges the mechanistic determinism of the world by challenging the kind of unity of the self which this ideology implies.

'The ideals of disengaged reason and of Romantic fulfilment both rely in different ways on a notion of the unitary self. The first requires a tight centre of control which dominates experience and is capable of constructing the orders of reason by which we can direct thought and life. The second sees the originally divided self come to unity in the alignment of sensibility and reason. Now to the extent that both of these come to be seen as facets of a world and an outlook whose claims to embrace everything we want to escape ... the liberation of experience can seem to require that we step outside the circle of the single, unitary identity, and that we open ourselves to the flux which moves beyond the scope of control or integration.'¹³

Taylor notes that another characteristic of this movement is a reinterpretation of time and lived experience. There is a modernist attack levelled at the modes of narrativity and time-consciousness associated with disengaged instrumental reason. Philosophers like Bergson and Heidegger, as well as poets like Proust and Eliot, give us alternative views to the spatialisation of time. 'The modernist retrieval of experience thus involves a profound breach in the received sense of identity and time,

¹²Ibid, p.461.

¹³Ibid, p.462.

and a series of reorderings of a strange and unfamiliar kind.’¹⁴ Taylor thinks that as a result of these two changes, the language of art has become even ‘subtler’ in the 20th century. No longer are we merely dealing with symbols which can translate our experience to a more meaningful complement. Thus Cecil Collins writes that ‘*Symbols are not things representing something else, they are actual emotions of the reality of existence, realised in concrete form, that can be experienced.*’¹⁵ In the language of poetry and art the epiphany is now to be found between the lines.

In one sense we can still understand what a poem is ‘about’. Taylor gives the example of ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ which he thinks concerns the ‘etiolated, pusillanimous life of contemporary man, or one such.’¹⁶ But even this is never fully articulated in the work. Likewise, Cecil Collins’ series entitled the *Vision of the Fool* (figs. 7 and 8), evokes a sense of man’s predicament, his limitations and desires, his need for grace, but this is nowhere spelled out for us through the symbolic efforts of his figures.¹⁷

This point can be made even stronger with reference to the abstract painters of modernity. Jackson Pollock, originally captivated by the power of American Indian symbolism, moved beyond this, first in works clearly derived from this heritage such as his *Totem* series (fig. 9) (where he invokes the mysticism of ritual like an artistic shaman), and finally to his celebrated drip paintings of complete abstraction (fig. 10). The Abstract Expressionism of the 1940’s and 50’s was a language so subtle it left many people convinced it was communicating nothing at all.

The epiphany in such an instance is indirect. The movement from Impressionism to the kinds of Conceptual Art which are being created today reveals

¹⁴Ibid., p.465.

¹⁵Cecil Collins, *The Vision of the Fool*, p.66.

¹⁶See *Sources of the Self*, p.466.

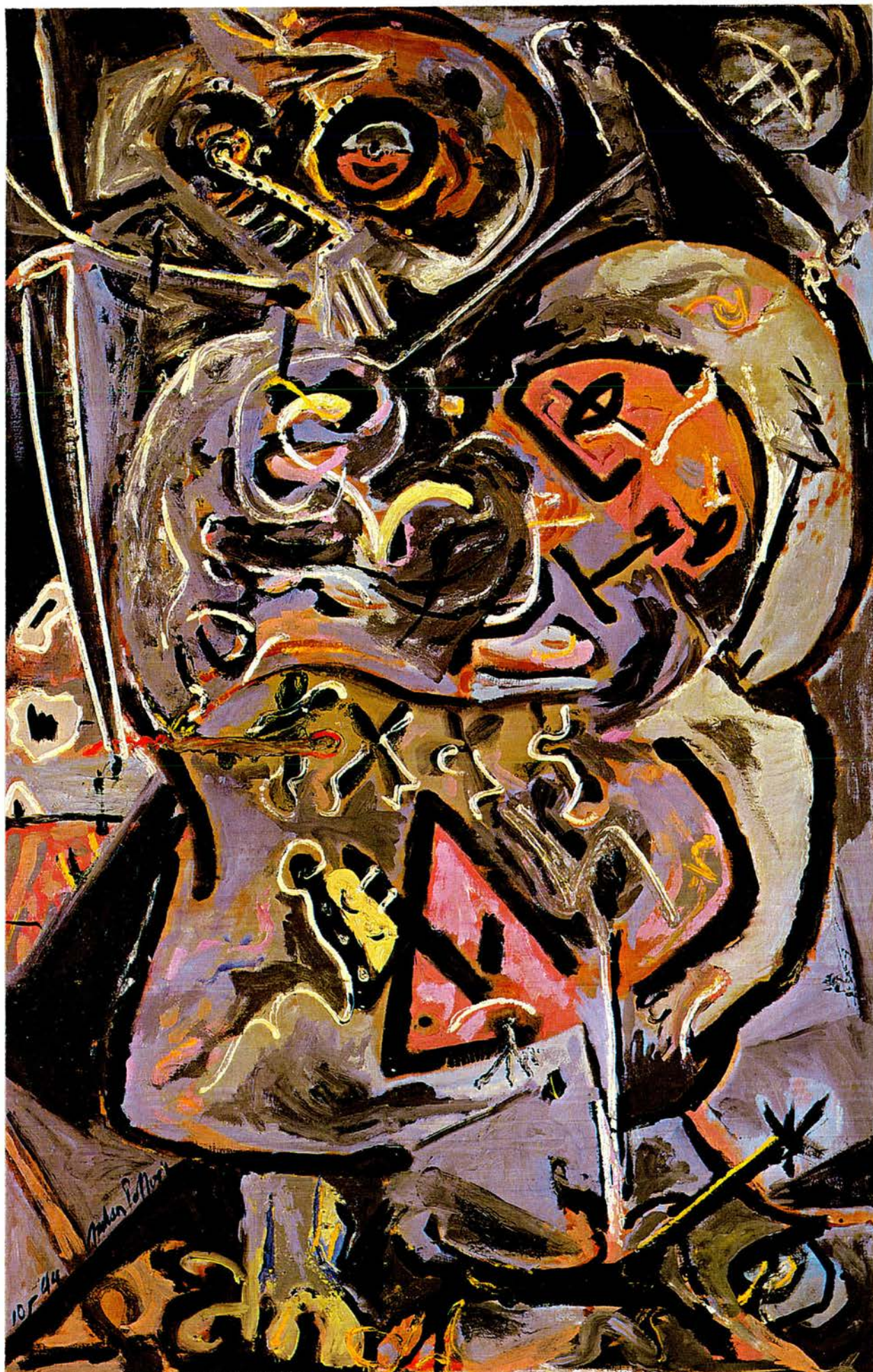
¹⁷Collins’ particular iconography is powerfully relevant given his image of the Fool as one in whom the saint, the artist and the poet all find their place. The Fool is ‘the purity of consciousness’. He is the humblest of creatures who the world rejects and despises. Not surprisingly, Collins thinks that the greatest Fool in history was Christ. ‘This great Fool was crucified by the commercial pharisees, by the authority of the respectable, and by the mediocre official culture of the philistines. And has not the church crucified Christ more deeply and subtly by its hypocrisy, than any pagan? This Divine Fool, whose immortal compassion and holy folly placed a light in the dark hands of the world.’ (*Vision of the Fool*, p.74).



7. Cecil Collins, *Fool and Angel Entering a City*, 1969, Private Collection



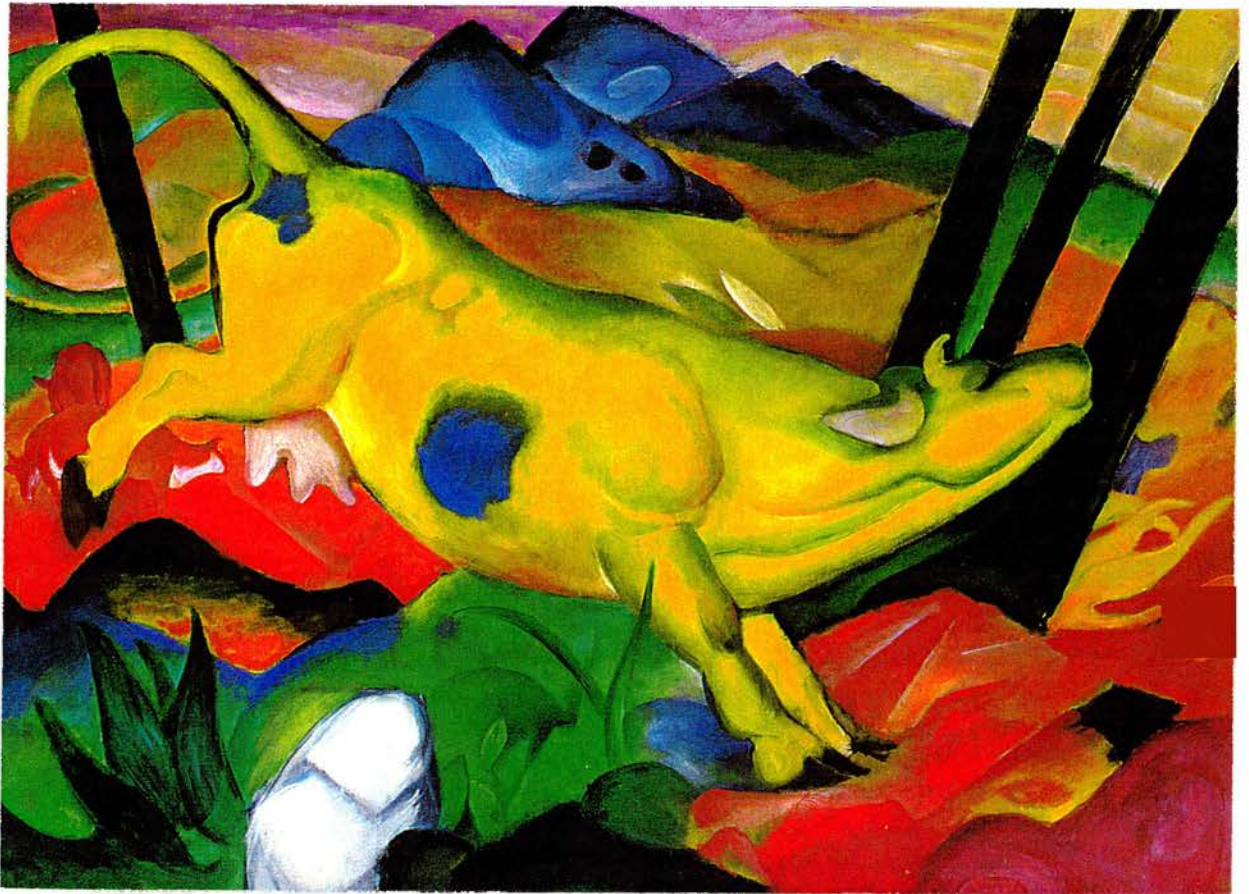
8. Cecil Collins, *The Sleeping Fool*, 1943, Tate Gallery, London



9. Jackson Pollock, *Totem Lesson 1*, 1944, Private Collection



10. Jackson Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30*, 1950, 1950, The Metropolitan Museum of Fine Art, New York



11. Franz Marc, *Yellow Cow*, 1911, The Guggenheim Museum, New York

an important evolution regarding various ways of seeing the world. Paul Tillich, for example, greatly admired the Expressionists for their truthfulness to a reality beyond the surface representations of boating parties on the Seine or superficial portraits of beautiful children. Their message for Tillich was one which attempted to come to grips with the condition of humanity:

‘As an art movement, Expressionism originally referred to developments in Germany and France in which the natural, self-contained finite world was rejected in favour of a view of the world in which depth and ultimacy were affirmed beneath the surface of reality as then perceived by society ... the art world to be overcome was that of a naturalistic realism. Here the world is represented in terms of itself, as if what one saw around one was the real. This involved a beautifying naturalism, a facile art without depth, which Tillich characterised with the German word *Kitsch*.’¹⁸

There was never any purport in the art of Roualt and other German Expressionists to represent figures one would actually see in everyday life. Their work broke through the surface of ‘naturalism’ to a more ‘ultimate’ reality. In this the paintings transformed the spectator’s way of seeing. There is a vision involved which does not belong to this world. The evocative work of Franz Marc, for example, sets as its task the transformation of our everyday experience into flat, vibrant colours. The objects (notably animals) are still recognisable, yet it is as if we are seeing them in an altogether different visionary scheme (fig. 11).

Taylor focuses on the duality involved here in the truly epiphanic art of modernity. There is an ‘uncollapsible distance between agent and world, between thinker and instinctual depths.’¹⁹ The artists of modernism recognised that there was no such thing as unmediated experience. In visual arts this manifested itself most clearly in the post-Impressionist preoccupation with form. In poetry, writers like Pound with his theory of the ideogram indicate the same understanding. As Taylor enunciates Pound’s vision, he explains that the poet found the mediation of form in

¹⁸See Paul Tillich, *On Art and Architecture*, eds. John Dillenberger and Jane Dillenberger (New York: Crossroad, 1989) p.xvi. Tillich not only criticises the Impressionists, but any type of facile ‘naturalism’. He describes Dali’s Christ in the *Sacrament of the Last Supper* as ‘a sentimental but very good athlete in an American baseball team. ... The technique is a beautifying naturalism of the worst kind. I am horrified by it. [It is] simply junk.’ (*Time Magazine*, 19, 1965, p.46, quoted in Paul Tillich, *On Art and Architecture*, p.xvi.).

¹⁹See *Sources of the Self*, p.172.

works like 'In a Station of the Metro' to be a vehicle for poetic vision between the lines and thus beyond them.²⁰ Essentially Pound's notion of metaphor partakes of the Japanese haiku structure which sees objects juxtaposed against each other as 'interpretive' not just 'ornamental'.

Art as Transcendent Epiphany

Taylor asks an important question for Christian ethics: 'Where does epiphany stand in relation to this new subjective vision?'. If the point of this poetry is, as Pound himself has suggested, merely capturing a true emotion, or the 'expression of emotional values', then there is nothing necessarily *higher* involved, there is no transcendent epiphanic vision entailed. Taylor argues that this is not a justified interpretation of Pound (or for that matter T. S. Eliot). For Pound, 'the reality we are meant to report accurately on is not the bare scene, but the scene transfigured by emotion.' More importantly, Taylor asserts that, 'the emotion, in turn, is not simply personal or subjective; it is a response to a pattern in things which rightly commands this feeling. It is this pattern which is the "thing which has been clearly seen", and which the "precise interpretive metaphor" captures.'²¹ So the accuracy in Pound's poetry is not simply mimetic, it is liberating us from the constraints of conventional ways of seeing.

Something like this is called to mind in Walter Pater's famous dictum that 'all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.'²² It is a transfiguring of the world in a language which both describes and substantiates. Taylor understands these kinds of epiphanies as 'framing' epiphanies whereby a vortex or void is created within which the revelation can occur. He places this in direct antithesis to the Romantic epiphanies of being which would reveal to us in the words or images, in

²⁰Ibid., p.473.

²¹Ibid., p.475.

²²See Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, ed. D. L. Hill, 4th ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980) p.106.

some symbolic language a transfiguration of Nature and our inner selves in harmony with that source.

Taylor is quick to argue, however, that there are certain key features in both Modern and Romantic kinds of epiphanic art. The most crucial is that they both resist any understanding of themselves in subjectivist terms. Neither are willing to see art as mere expressions of feeling. Taylor sees the progression from the Romantics to the Modernists as a continual retrieval of lost contact with moral and spiritual sources 'through the exercise of creative imagination.' He goes on to say that

'These sources may be divine, or in the world, or in the powers of the self. They may be seen as new, hitherto untouched, or as in the case of Pound and Eliot, the aim may be to restore the power of old ones which have been lost. The aspiration, however conceived, is usually made more urgent by the sense that our modern fragmented, instrumentalist society has narrowed and impoverished our lives. This also is in striking continuity with the Romantics, for all the reversals modernism brought.'²³

This is why Taylor sees the epiphanic characteristics of modern art as a significant example of transcendence. It is also where he understands the poets and painters of our time to be speaking a moral language, for they are striving to articulate constitutive goods be they God, Nature, or the Inner self. This is powerfully evoked in William Stafford's poem 'Epiphany':

You thinkers, prisoners of what will work:
a dog ran by me in the street one night,
its path met by its feet in quick unthought,
and I stooped in a sudden Christmas, purposeless,
a miracle without a proof, soon lost.

But I still call, 'Here, Other, Other,' in the dark.²⁴

Stafford's endeavour is to understand the human condition. We are pejoratively addressed as 'thinkers, prisoners of what will work'. Yet he describes a 'sudden Christmas' which reaches beyond this predicament of instrumental reasoning, and in doing so engages in a moral exercise about meaningfulness.

²³*Sources of the Self*, p.490.

²⁴William Stafford, 'Epiphany', in *Allegiances* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

In this way the artists of our time (and arguably any era) do not fit into the value categories defined by Kant and re-interpreted by Habermas.²⁵ They do not attend merely to the subjectivist realm of emotion. Rather, they seek something beyond mere feelings. Their interpretations indicate that they are striving to understand a particular order beyond human experience, something akin to an Aristotelian cosmos if not a Divine structure. By seeking such sources they are no longer playing by Kant's rules. For they are not interested primarily in subjective freedom as the most significant way of understanding knowledge. There is a substantive claim to 'the way things are' which allows someone like Pound to speak of truth and accuracy in his depictions. The difference in these subtler languages of art, Taylor argues, is that 'the metaphysics or theology comes indexed to a personal vision, or refracted through a particular sensibility.'²⁶

So unlike the public belief in God that was so apparent in the Middle Ages, where everyone was leaning on an assumed transcendence, there is nothing in the domain of theology or metaphysics today which is publicly available background. Taylor talks about this background as analogous to the assumed beliefs which Wittgenstein analyses in *On Certainty*.²⁷ We take it for granted, for example, that the earth will remain solid under our feet, not because we have purposefully set out to prove this and thus believe it to be true, but because we are too busy relying on the belief even to think about it. Taylor pictures a pre-18th century belief in God in this light, as something so real, public and apparent, that one did not even stop to question it. 'In our public and private life of prayer, penance, devotion, religious discipline, we lean on God's existence, use it as the pivot of our action, even when

²⁵In *Theories of Communicative Action* Habermas describes three categories—science, morality, and aesthetics—deriving from Kant. The sphere of science deals with issues of truth and the task of mapping reality, the sphere of morals is concerned with questions of right and wrong with a Kantian criteria of normative validity (only more dialogical). Finally, the aesthetic sphere deals with questions of beauty, but is something which is centred around the self. In one sense the sphere of the aesthetic is seen as self-expressive, i.e., art is a subjective concern for Habermas. The artists of modernity that Taylor discusses, however, indicate that there are those creating within the sphere of the aesthetic who think of themselves and their work not as either expressing the self (or in terms of the deconstruction of the self), but as concerned with something which transcends this realm. It seems that Habermas is being unjustifiably dogmatic when he tries to force artists into the Procrustean bed of the subjective self. Clearly many of them are working beyond these boundaries.

²⁶*Sources of the Self*, p.491.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p.491.

we aren't formulating our belief, as I use the stairs or the banister in the course of my focal action of getting down to the kitchen to cook a meal.'²⁸ The lack of this public belief, however, does not for Taylor exclude the artist from having recourse to these transcendent domains. On the contrary even though the 'nugget of transcendent truth' is indexed to a personal vision, it is still a move beyond the self. Taylor would no doubt find the words of Cecil Collins compelling:

'The idea of a source means that the source is greater than that which comes from the source, it is something higher than that which needs to feed from the source, something more potent than our potency. True personal happiness comes from superpersonal happiness. When we pray and worship God, we open up our nature and receive that which is higher than our nature, that which is wiser than our nature, that which is happier than our nature; we open up our nature to receive a portion of the happiness of all Happiness.'²⁹

The Existential Paradox

One way of approaching Taylor's idea of transcendence in modernity is to see it as a kind of paradox. On the one hand there is, in the articulation of these sources, a movement beyond the self. The moral order which is the grounding of things is to be found in the spiritual. On the other hand, what is important is not this truth taken out of context, but the self's access to this truth. So modern epiphanies must be read as subjective, but at the same time objective.

The theological relevance for this reading of the modern epiphany has been linked to thinkers such as Bultmann, Tillich and Buber who have been developing existential theologies around this paradox.³⁰ Most notably these theologians have demonstrated a critical stance towards mechanistic, secularist ideologies, and have

²⁸Ibid., p.491.

²⁹See Cecil Collins, *The Vision of the Fool*, p.35.

³⁰See for example, Rudolf Bultmann, 'Jesus Christ and Mythology' in *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. H. W. Bartsch (London: SPCK, 1953), Paul Tillich, *Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology* (London: SCM, 1967), and Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (Edinburgh, T.& T. Clark, 1937). See also Schubert Ogden, *Christ without myth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961) and Hans W. Frei, 'Niebuhr's theological background', in *Faith and ethics*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New York: Harper, 1957).

focused on the primacy of human freedom. Central to an existential theology is the belief that the route to the divine lies within the self, and like the modernist poet and painter, it sees the divine (or ultimate reality) inextricably linked to a personal vision. This association of artist and theologian is convincingly developed by Michael Morgan as it relates to Taylor's moral theory.³¹

Morgan believes that Taylor's demonstration of a possible transcendence which is nevertheless indexed to a personal vision can go a long way towards recovering a place for religion in a world where notions of transcendence rarely even get off the ground. 'In Buber, Rosenzweig, as in Kierkegaard, Barth and other 'modernist' theologians, this tension is expressed as the conflict between human freedom and divine power ...'.³² The way of accommodating this conflict usually entails anchoring the meaning and content of revelation in the human subject. 'The content is a human articulation of the meaning of the relation to God.'³³ Morgan obviously has great sympathy for this stance and believes that Taylor's articulation of the modern epiphany helps to affirm this. For he argues that one of the great difficulties with religious belief in modernity is the divine-human relationship based on the dichotomy of king-servant, master-slave. The problem with this theology, according to Morgan, is that it rules out any possibility of human freedom. Only in a modern existential theology can this obstacle be surmounted, and Morgan considers this to be Taylor's only possible course of action.

Taylor's concept of transcendence, however, is more orthodox than Morgan would want to admit. While Taylor acknowledges that his treatment of religious belief is and must be modern in terms of methodology, it does not exclude traditional contents or doctrines. The epistemological foreground in Taylor's view must be given to our moral and spiritual experiences. In other words, we must rely on these premonitions in order to give our best account of our religious belief. In the age of Christendom, however, this was not necessarily the case. The belief in a transcendent God was assumed as a background and as such was much less problematic. Taylor

³¹See Michael Morgan, 'Religion, History, and Moral Discourse', in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*.

³²Ibid., pp.62-63.

³³Ibid., p.63.

asserts, however, that in modern culture we cannot argue for God as an obvious object in the universe the way one would argue for the existence of rocks and trees. In so doing, he approaches religious belief, and the belief in the transcendent, from an entirely different vantage point. Nevertheless this modern account of belief does not (as Morgan wants to suggest) exclude any pre-modern objects of faith. Just because we cannot help but ground a visionary revelation in some personal experience does not mean that the reality of that is completely subjective or non-other. Therefore Taylor does not think that his account of religious faith 'rules out any substantive view, up to the most 'transcendent' and non-human-centred.' He follows this by admitting that, 'Indeed, I don't think my view is all that *human-centred* ...'.³⁴

Moral Transcendence

This is a much stronger notion of transcendence than most modernists are comfortable with. Martha Nussbaum, for example, sees transcendence as in some way living up to one's absolute potential. In a sense she sees it as substantiating the Nietzschean *übermensch*. Giving this an Aristotelian twist, Nussbaum is intent on developing a moral theory which incorporates the kind of mean articulated in Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. She argues that there are a variety of different ways of failing to achieve moral perfection, but only one targeted mean, and transcending in this regard is defined by getting it right *viz.* living the good life as a virtuous person. By doing so we transcend the normal, even dysfunctional examples of being human and obtain the moral middle ground.³⁵

Another moral philosopher who has a specific idea of transcendence, but one which is closer to Taylor's, and in fact has influenced Taylor's own thinking on this subject, is Iris Murdoch. In *The Sovereignty of Good*, Murdoch gives a brief synopsis of modern philosophy and scientific thought in which she accuses these disciplines of internalising the human agent to a point beyond any possible reference to the

³⁴See 'Reply and re-articulation', in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*. My italics.

³⁵See Martha Nussbaum, 'Transcending Humanity' in *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) pp.365-391.

transcendent. Like Taylor she exposes the inconsistencies of naturalist, mechanistic explanations of human behaviour, and following on from this she sees the neo-Kantian and utilitarian modes of thinking as those responsible for such an emphasis in philosophy. She indicates that Wittgenstein, with his arguments against a private language, opened up a space in which the utilitarian and Kantian could justify a position of procedural ethics. Their arguments follow from the impossibility of a private language to the impossibility of morality being rooted in anything but actions. Naturally this is stimulated by a need to feel as if one is actually making a difference in the world. Any moral theory which does not have a place for action can easily be seen as useless posturing, even cruelly inappropriate in the face of suffering and evil. But what the content of such theories tends to emphasise is the denial of any reference to the good. 'As the inner life is hazy, largely absent, and any way "not part of the mechanism"', it turns out to be *logically* impossible to take up an idle contemplative attitude to the good [Aristotle]. Morality must be action since mental concepts can only be analysed genetically.³⁶ What this means, however, is that if we can have no reference to the inner soul, we also can have no reference to any metaphysical 'other' which transcends the self. Murdoch wants to argue that we must be able to have recourse to such sources, for in our impressions—in certain concepts of perfection and the individual—we are already living by these assumptions.

An important facet of this belief for Murdoch is the 'synthetic' a priori of the human as fallen, sinful and imperfect. The moral agent is limited in his love and human knowledge. This is an extremely powerful claim for Murdoch since she argues that 'Love is knowledge of the individual', yet because of our finitude we are unable to carry this out fully.³⁷ This is similar to what Reinhold Niebuhr has tried to evoke in *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, by speaking of the tension that exists between the tug of the transcendent and the realisation of our finitude. Within this tension we experience God, we create art, we live our moral lives.³⁸

We also need to recognise our limitations within this realm of conflict. In this sense getting beyond ourselves is the antithesis of what Nussbaum wants to claim as

³⁶See Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, p.15.

³⁷Ibid., p.28.

³⁸See Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 2 vols., (London: Nisbet, 1941) I: chps.7&8.

the nature of transcendence. There is a redemptive role for the grace of the transcendent which Nietzsche would consider to be morally abhorrent. Murdoch asserts that,

‘our picture of ourselves has become too grand, we have isolated, and identified ourselves with, an unrealistic conception of will, we have lost the vision of a reality separate from ourselves, and we have no adequate conception of original sin. Kierkegaard rightly observed that “an ethic which ignores sin is an altogether useless science,” although he also added, “but if it recognises sin it is *eo ipso* beyond its sphere”.’³⁹

Picturing the good is both difficult and problematic. The idea of goodness and virtue has largely been prescinded by the idea of what is right. Murdoch, like Taylor, thinks this is largely due to the lack of any permanent background or articulated moral horizon whether it be God, History, Reason, or Nature. ‘The agent, thin as a needle, appears in the quick flash of the choosing will.’⁴⁰ Incorporated into Murdoch’s theory is the concept of ‘attention’ which she establishes from Simone Weil. A just and loving gaze on our moral sources, she believes, is the characteristic and proper mark of the active moral agent. This is both normative and logical for her (and for Taylor). It is what *should* be the case and what *must* inescapably be so. This is exactly why Taylor can argue that the utilitarian or Kantian cannot help but have recourse to some substantive good, even if they do not want to own up to the fact.⁴¹

Murdoch describes prayer as the Christian description of this loving gaze on our moral source. Prayer is not in its true form petition, but rather ‘an attention to God which is a form of love.’ This is surely what C. S. Lewis was referring to when he insisted that the best kinds of prayers are those which do not involve any words. Speaking to the Christian, Lewis says, ‘Prayer in the sense of petition, asking for things, is a small part of it; confession and penitence are its threshold, adoration its sanctuary, the presence and vision and enjoyment of God its bread and wine. In it God shows Himself to us.’⁴²

³⁹See Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, p.47.

⁴⁰Ibid., p.53.

⁴¹See Chapter 3.

⁴²See C. S. Lewis, *A Mind Awake*, ed. Clyde S. Kilby (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968) p.146.

family and all the life-goods that can be affirmed in that context in order to reach a harmonious and prosperous community ruled by philosophers.⁴⁴

This kind of transcendence, one which asks the individual to go beyond what one normally understands as the fulfilled human life, has been seen as suffocating. Since the Enlightenment it has been a basic form of criticism against religion. Nietzsche, as mentioned above, has developed a polemic against the self-mutilating potential of transcendence, and something similar can be found in the Frankfurt School.⁴⁵

Taylor, however, argues that transcendence properly conceived does not lead to a denial of the self, rather to a fulfilment beyond the self. He insists that it can be understood as bursting out of the limitations entailed in our ordinary life goods to a higher realm. The true way of the Gospel is 'a possible vocation for human beings that transcends, that goes beyond, that even breaks out of ... the self, the ordinary way of operating as human beings ... it's a way in which we see a vocation for ourselves, a road for ourselves, that involves breaking beyond these normal vocations, and so it's relation to our ethical understanding is the same uneasy one that any one of those paths proposed by either Plato or Buddha and so on, are.'⁴⁶ The constitutive character of God and the goods within which we must anchor a Christian ethic are ones which will transcend our human goods in this way.

This is not to say that Taylor is advocating a belief in a total, objective transcendence of the kind described by Kant in the *Critique of Reason*. If this were true one could not possibly *know* that which is beyond in any meaningful way. There must be some recourse to one's personal experiences, one's moral and epistemological vantage point. The individual has a sense of the limits of human resources and the idea of perfection as well as the power of the Good. From this we can make what George Steiner has called a 'wager on transcendence.'⁴⁷ But our understanding of this wager in Christian ethics must be theocentric. The human agent

⁴⁴See *Republic*, Bk.V.

⁴⁵See for example, Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human all too Human*, 2 vols., trans. Helen Zimmern, ed. Oscar Levy (London: T. N. Foulis, 1909) I:139ff., and Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, trans. Michael Robertson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986).

⁴⁶See Appendix E.

⁴⁷See George Steiner, *Real Presences* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989) p.4.

must play a humble role. Transcendence has to do with the decentering of the self away from the temptations of the Nietzschean *übermensch*, even away from the notions of a good life that Nussbaum wants to articulate. One must be ready to deny the idea of human fulfilment, even be ‘ready to sacrifice it, give it up, make a leap beyond that’ The concept of transcendence ‘ ... which you see very clearly in the Cross, in the Christian Faith, which you see in Buddhism in another way, it can’t be fitted into ... [Nussbaum’s] ... category.’⁴⁸ It is something that cuts across the frameworks of a fulfilled human life as this is normally understood. ‘It’s not another bit of fulfilment which we’ve got to cram into the picture with everything else. It is something that can take you quite outside and beyond that, can make a sacrifice of that.’⁴⁹

An objection to this kind of radical decentering of the self can be made on the practical level of conflicting goods and moral reasoning. One may ask what prevents an individual claiming a special dispensation from God which in a theocentric morality would trump the goods of a community. One of the most tragic examples of this in the past year has been the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. The law student, Yigal Amir, who shot the Israeli prime minister, testified that he was acting on God’s orders. Taylor’s reply to this kind of extreme and brutal theophany is to point to the Gospel as evidence that we have not been left entirely without guidelines in judging these kinds of matters. On the one hand the Christian ethic of transcendence is ‘this personal calling to go beyond that which comes in people’s lives in totally different ways, and which involves some development of some personal relationship with God’ On the other hand, we are not left without anything upon which to make judgements:

‘ ... we have the example in the Gospel, a paradigm example of transcending, of giving it all up. Of course, in doing all that, well, we have a story that doesn’t involve murder. It involves being murdered. It doesn’t involve using force. There even are specific events of the story, episodes of temptation which involve being effective—normal, historical ways of being effective ... and these are deliberately set aside. The story is that these are rejected. So we’re not left totally without guidelines. If somebody comes along and says “we’ll wipe all

⁴⁸See Appendix E.

⁴⁹Ibid.

these people out because God told me to,” it doesn’t square with what one finds in history, in the Gospels.’⁵⁰



Ontology and Theology

With the idea of transcendence, as Taylor understands it, a relationship is established between the human agent and some reality beyond the self. Underlying this relationship is the important question of ontology. The concept of *being* in theology has long been considered the bedrock for establishing both the nature of God and our relationship to Him. When asking questions about God’s character, being is already assumed. Ontology is in effect a ‘pre-theology’, an inquiry into the being of those entities discussed in theology. Heidegger understood the inescapable link between ontology and theology when he wrote that ‘Theology is seeking a more primordial interpretation (than formerly) of the being of man in relation to God, prescribed by the meaning of faith itself and remaining within it.’⁵¹

Ontical statements must rely on some concept of being. In other words statements about the human agent must relate in some way to the human agent existing. This is what Heidegger’s phrase *Dasein* is meant to invoke—humanity understood ontologically. One difficulty with this existential focus, however, particularly with the way Taylor views transcendence, is that it sets up an investigation which is primarily anthropocentric. There is no reason to introduce any variable beyond our own existence. Yet without the transcendent such an ontology quickly slides into nihilism.

John Macquarrie has made a persuasive application of Heidegger’s idea of anxiety—the fact that we are apprehensive about our existence in the world—by

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.10.

relating it to the New Testament teaching of Mankind as stranger in the world. He argues that man's being is such that 'he cannot find contentment in the world, and even when he is lulled into a false sense of security, a fundamental uneasiness ... arises out of the very constitution of his being, and breaks in to disclose to him that he is not at home, that the world is uncanny (*unheimlich*), and can be hostile when man surrenders himself to it.'⁵²

There are two objections which the Christian theologian must put forward to this idea, one relatively simple, one more involved. First, it is not just a matter of the world being hostile in the sense that we must fight against the elements the way Hilary and Tenzing did when they conquered Mount Everest. This anxiety does not stem from the same source that Burke and others saw as the fountain of the Sublime. Triumphant over nature will not alleviate this angst.

Secondly, and more importantly, such an existential emphasis still has no recourse to why it is that we feel anxious. The ontology of such a philosophy does not extend to a thick description of God which relates the individual in such a way as to define him by the transcendent, and thus explain why it is that we are foreigners in this world (or at least partially unfulfilled). In the Christian ontology there is the 'Other beyond' which is defining us, which does not have its origin in this natural realm. This Other must come into the equation of fulfilment by bringing us out of this natural realm. This alone can account for why it is that here in the terra firma of our existence we feel like metaphysical fish out of water.

The existentialist has no recourse to this transcendent dimension, although the kind of existential theology Macquarrie is arguing for is not a typical articulation. He realises that this anxiety and the recognition of this is only the first step in reaching the New Testament doctrine. 'The disclosure does not indeed yield the explicit knowledge of God, but directs man to God as the ground of his being ...'⁵³ What Macquarrie is speaking of here is humanity's feeling of 'dependence' which points to God. This can go a long way towards arguing for God as a moral source, and as such, an ontologically relevant feature in our moral frameworks.

⁵²See John Macquarrie, *An Existentialist Theology* (London: SCM, 1955) p.67.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p.68.

Not all have been driven to God from this condition, however. Both Sartre and Camus addressed this tension, but in the face of the absurd the most important point of one's existence for them was achieving absolute freedom through self-formulation. Camus even argued that to ^{the}'leap' to God that Kierkegaard had made was 'philosophical suicide'.⁵⁴ Macquarrie describes the two possible conclusions from recognising this anxiety in the following manner:

'when man's existence is disclosed to himself in the mood of ontological anxiety as possibility bound up with the world, there are two possible ways in which he can interpret his situation. He can accept that he is thrown into an ocean of being, alien and even hostile to himself, in which he must exist; or he can seek a ground of being, which means simply a Creator who is author both of man's being and of the being of nature.'⁵⁵

Paul Tillich, another theologian to emphasise the importance of ontology, has observed that 'Finitude is the possibility of losing one's ontological structure and, with it, one's self. But this is a possibility, not a necessity. To be finite is to be threatened. But a threat is possibility, not actuality. The anxiety of finitude is not the despair of self-destruction. Christianity sees in the picture of Jesus as the Christ a human life in which all forms of anxiety are present but in which all forms of despair are absent.'⁵⁶

Nihilism results when the individual refuses to venture beyond the first of Macquarrie's two alternatives. The possibility of transcendence, however, lies in the actual state of being itself, for 'equally original with, and implied in, the disclosure to man in anxiety of his own being as possibility thrown into the ocean of what is, is the disclosure of the possibility of a Being who is not thrown into the sea of what is, because he is himself the ground of what is, being itself, beyond both the *Vorhandenheit* of inanimate things and the *Existenz* of man, both of which are contingent and conditioned.'⁵⁷

A theocentric ontology involves not just a 'pre-theological' inquiry, but a pre-ontological one as well. For as Tillich has phrased the issue: 'The being of God is

⁵⁴See Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Random House, 1955).

⁵⁵See John Macquarrie, *An Existentialist Theology*, pp.70-71.

⁵⁶Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I:201.

⁵⁷John Macquarrie, *An Existentialist Theology*, pp.71-72.

being-itself'.⁵⁸ It is not simply that God exists in the same way that creatures exist, alongside other beings. It must be the case that God is qualitatively higher than other beings. He is infinite, omnipotent, being itself—*esse ipso*. In existential terminology He is beyond the contrast of 'existence' and 'essence'. This is why for Tillich it is wrong to speak of God as existing, just as it is wrong to see Him as the universal essence of pantheism.⁵⁹

God as *being-itself* has His existence in His essence, the two are identical. 'Being-itself infinitely transcends every finite being. There is no proportion or gradation between the finite and the infinite. There is an absolute break, an infinite "jump". On the other hand, everything finite participates in being-itself and in its infinity.'⁶⁰

The important thrust here is to understand God as the sustainer and definer of our being. From this theocentric ontological claim we can make certain ontic statements about the nature of the human agent. Not only is this significant for a systematic understanding of theological questions, but what naturally flows from this is the need to anchor our moral intuitions in some strong concept of God's being as transcendent reality.

Various theological ethicists have honed in on specific events in the Christian history as revealing an ontology upon which Christian ethics can be founded. Stanley Hauerwas, for example, has concentrated on a 'kingdom' theology whereby we understand ethical issues within the framework of the Church.⁶¹ Others, like Keith Ward, have stressed the doctrine of creation arguing that because of the special relationship established in the creation a Christian ethic has recourse to cosmology as necessarily related to morality.⁶² Still others such as Oliver O'Donovan have sought to reconcile this polarisation by grounding our moral order in the Resurrection of Christ.⁶³ In all these articulations there is an assumed primacy for the character and

⁵⁸Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I:237.

⁵⁹This idea has been given a new impetus in some post-modern theologies. See particularly Jean-Luc Marion's *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁶⁰ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I:237.

⁶¹See Stanley Hauerwas, *The Priestly Kingdom* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

⁶²See Keith Ward, *The Divine Image: the foundations of Christian morality* (London: SPCK, 1976).

⁶³See Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

nature of God, an ontological springboard from which to leap into the realm of Christian ethics.

Being as Perfection

One of the most cogent ontologies is that of Aquinas. His theory of moral realism, which has had an influence on Charles Taylor's own formulations, argues that 'being' and 'goodness' are the same in reference and differ only in sense.⁶⁴ Given that goodness is what all desire, Aquinas argues that anything that is desired is desired to the extent that it is perfect—whole, complete, free from relevant defects. Furthermore, something is perfect of its kind to the extent that it has fully realised its potential—it has been actualised. Therefore, a thing is perfect and thus desirable (good of its kind) to the extent to which it is in *being*.⁶⁵ So being and goodness both have the same reference: the actualisation of a potentiality. Being can be understood in one of two ways. First, there is being as mere existence, so that when I talk about the Loch Ness Monster existing, I am talking of being (*ὄνσιν*) in this sense. Secondly, there is being as linked to value. As an individual possessing being in this way, I am linked to goodness in so far as there is a specifying potentiality of humanness, and when this is actualised, I am more fully a human being than I was before. In certain respects I have more *being* in me than prior to this actualised state. In this second definition of being it is inextricably linked to goodness. In terms of the human moral agent we can say that while on one level an individual *exists*, on another level reaching the potential involved in the human natural model brings one into *fuller* being. This of course is associated with the Aristotelian notion of *ergon*, what one is best suited for. It is the nature of human agency, according to Aristotle, to be rational, and as such there are specific ways of being fully human which include civic participation and divine contemplation. This kind of moral theory, which Aquinas invokes, has first to determine what kind of being the human agent is. The

⁶⁴See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, in *The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas: Introductory Readings*, trans. and ed. Christopher Martin (London: Routledge, 1988) Ia q.5.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, Ia q.5.

meta-ethic that follows on from this definition is dependent upon this ontology. There is a natural reference to God if we understand that reaching the potential amounts to coming closer to God, as total goodness, total actuality, total *Being*. God alone is essentially goodness itself.⁶⁶ Once we understand that man as defined by this total goodness must seek this good in order to be fully human, our ethics can follow on naturally.

Ontology and Basic Reasons

Charles Taylor's ideas about the nature of morality, as well as his propositions concerning how a moral ontology is to be structured, can help to bring this picture to fruition, and establish some common ground between disparate approaches to the question of a Christian ethic. For Taylor ontology is important in ethics in so far as he sees God as a constitutive good. A constitutive good is one which is not only incomparably higher than other goods (hypergoods) but one which is understood substantively. To be affected by such a good is to have a relationship with it, to understand it as a reality, a link to which constitutes the goodness of one's actions or motives. Theologically this means that God is that moral source which determines what good action is. Not only this, but for Taylor a constitutive good plays a role beyond merely defining; the love we have for God moves us to good action. God not only ontologically fixes the limits of what the good action is, but by loving Him we are empowered to do and be good. In such a way to see God is to see Him as Good.

This can be discerned, for example, in the authority of God and the effect this has on our moral disposition. We are not called to follow Divine commands reluctantly, to see them with a resentful eye the way the oppressed would interpret the laws of a tyrant. Rather we see them as good because we articulate the moral source of God as constituting their goodness.

⁶⁶Ibid., Ia q. 2, a. 3.

The sovereignty does not belong to God's law, but to God himself. His character takes us far beyond the purview of obligatory action. To submit truly to God is to love His authority. It is based on reality, on the nature of things, not on coercion or demand. If divine authority is to command us absolutely it must be truth. Authority in such a way presupposes the constitutive nature of God as the foundation of Being. For there must be a strong moral source involved in order to see the good substantively.

In this picture of God as a moral source it is important to distinguish between grounding our moral intuitions and constituting them. Grounding is often thought of as giving a reason for, in the foundationalist sense of the word. It includes giving the ultimate objective basis for a particular position. Taylor admits that much of our morality involves giving 'basic reasons' in this way. We argue that A is a better position to take than B because it leads to the result C which can be given as a basic reason. So, using an example from Taylor, balancing the budget is the right thing to do because it avoids inflation, and this will improve people's economic welfare. 'There is asymmetry here, because clearly we wouldn't have any reason to balance the budget, or fight inflation, if they didn't contribute to economic welfare, say, to the height and equitable distribution of income.'⁶⁷

Economic welfare in this example is functioning as a basic reason. This, however, does not apply in questions about the good. We cannot, for example, argue from a basic reason as such to conclude that economic welfare is a good. There is no foundationalist answer to what makes such a thing good or bad. Attempts may be made to give basic reasons for a basic reason. Such an argument would be 'You ought to pursue economic welfare because it leads to x.' But what is presumed in this argument is that 'x' is something that I am already committed to. The question left begging here is 'why am I committed to 'x'?''. The utilitarian answer may be something like economic welfare contributes to human happiness and this is what we ought to strive for. The problem, as Taylor explains it, is that when economic welfare

⁶⁷See Charles Taylor, 'Reply to Braybrooke and de Sousa', pp.125-131

no longer contributes to human happiness this is no longer something which should be pursued.⁶⁸

This distinction has a profound effect on how we understand Christian ethics. When someone says, for example, that we ought not to oppress the poor because God has commanded us to seek our neighbour's good, he is in effect giving a basic reason for this moral action. If God no longer commanded us to seek the good of our neighbour then we could use extortion in our dealings with others and be morally above reproach. The problem with this view is that anything could be considered morally the right thing to do merely by 'divine' fiat. This leads to a kind of cosmic relativity whereby God is an objective *de facto* reason for morality which could at anytime shift. He becomes an extreme dispensationalist. 'Thou shall not kill' is a rule that we hold to at this particular time in history, but there is no arbitrating between this moral position and others which happen to differ.

Another reason for arguing against such a view has to do with our tendency towards hubris. Gene Outka makes the point that what he calls 'code morality' is *religiously* perilous because:

'However praiseworthy specific rules and laws might be in themselves, they may furnish a sublime opportunity for corruption on the highest level. They may prompt a fatal shift in priorities, where the self turns away from the God who commands in order to deliberate in advance on what ought to happen to the loving man, what specifically he must do. This may in turn encourage human presumption by at least implying that man has the immanent capacity to perceive God's command, that this perception *pertains* to man as such (rather than continually *accruing* to him). Whenever such an implication is drawn, the basis for confidence will have disastrously shifted.'⁶⁹

Karl Barth reminds us that ethical theory 'is not meant to provide man with a program the implementation of which would be his life's goal.' Rather, to avoid the predicament that Outka describes, we must understand as Barth does that 'Ethics exists to remind man of his confrontation with God, who is the light illuminating all his actions.'⁷⁰ If Christianity is to have an ethic at all, God's constitutive transcending

⁶⁸This is discussed in the context of moral reasoning in Chapter 2.

⁶⁹See Gene Outka, *Agape: An Ethical Analysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972) p. 231.

⁷⁰See Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. Thomas Wieser (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1963) p.86.

nature must play an important role. Taylor himself implies this when identifying certain functions that the constitutive nature of a good can incorporate:

‘The point of articulating what I have called one’s “constitutive goods” (which for the theist certainly involve God) is not “grounding,” but is usually (i) to clarify and make more vivid what is involved in a certain goal of life good; and often (ii) to empower one by a more potent sense of the constitutive good as a source. My complaints about the more reductive strains of the Enlightenment when they shy away from constitutive goods is not that they are thereby failing to “ground” their moral stands, but ... that they are not coming clean about their own sources.’⁷¹

This becomes slightly problematic for someone like Oliver O’Donovan who wants to set up a ‘Moral Order’ in Christian ethics. For while he does admit that knowledge must be grounded in being, he seems to over-emphasise the order of morality as if this is some kind of neo-nominalist posturing based on the divine will which manifests itself in the divine command.⁷² Such an emphasis negates the power of the good since it concentrates on a ‘thin’ description of God as author of the Law rather than incarnate Grace and Love. Phrases like ‘objective ontological standing’ point to a kind of oxymoron as far as God constituting the good is concerned. Being in terms of ontological significance implies that one is never objective. There is a non-neutral dimension which is inescapable. One cannot see God as a constitutive good and not both love this good and see it as good. Failing to see this means missing the ontological point of the exercise, and slipping into an Occamite theology. ‘Christianity,’ declares Tillich, ‘has emphasised the split between the created goodness of things and their distorted existence. But the good is not considered an arbitrary commandment imposed by an all-powerful existent on the other existents. It is the essential structure of reality.’⁷³

⁷¹Taylor, ‘Reply to Braybrooke and de Sousa’, p.130.

⁷²I should qualify my polemic against O’Donovan at this point, for while he does use language pregnant with a ‘basic reason’ mentality, as a whole his moral argument is rooted in the character of God as manifested in the Bible. As such I am sympathetic to his project, but am wary about the specific articulations of his argument.

⁷³See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I:204.

The Law and Gospel

The dichotomy between Law and Gospel brings this out even more clearly. The Law in and of itself represents a procedural ethic, one which has no recourse to the good. It can only condemn us (Romans 7). In modern language the Law is a ‘thin’ moral description. In order for it to have any positive meaning it must be constituted by a moral source. Christ Incarnate represents this source. He is the constitutive good of the ontic logos made flesh. Fulfilment of the Law in Christ can be understood as articulating the moral source of the goods represented in the Law.

It is not merely the case as O’Donovan wants to argue, that ‘God has willed that the restored creation should take form in, and in relation to, one man.’⁷⁴ The identity of Jesus Christ is beyond such a mere historical fact. There is a significant moral dimension which inextricably joins Jesus Christ with God as our moral source. Putting this on the level of a divine command places the entire ontological project in jeopardy by attempting to give a basic reason for the Incarnation.

God sent his begotten son, but it was not merely because of His will that this happened. It is not the case that if He so desired, He could have sent five sons instead of one. Identity with the Trinity, and its ontological nature, necessitated that one of three is represented in the Incarnation, but all are equally present. Because of the nature of God—His sustaining Being and character as a constitutive good—the Incarnation could only take this form. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.

Jesus is not *just* the man God chose for the job, or even the first adopted ‘son’ of God. He *is* God (the very difference between ‘creating’ and ‘begetting’). In many respects because O’Donovan’s argument is committed to focusing too strongly on a kind of moral order apart from God’s Being (one set up by divine will), he is forced to rely on a procedural ethic which negates his own underlying insistence for a strong moral source—an ontological dimension. Taylor argues that in such cases there is a

⁷⁴See Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, p.150.

need to articulate the moral sources which underlie our presuppositions. We must 'finally put our ontologies where our (rhetorical) mouths are.'⁷⁵

The Gospel of Jesus Christ as God incarnate does not only help to define and constitute the moral obligations dictated to us by the Law, but it offers us the redemptive power of God as our moral source. Keeping in mind Taylor's premise that loving such a source empowers us to achieve the good, we can see likewise that Christ as a constitutive good (indeed as the *Sumum Bonum*), by his grace, enables us to do the good. It is through the power of the Incarnate Word that we are able to overcome the condemnation of the Law. Furthermore if we attempt to deny this power and seek justification through the Law, we negate the redemptive grace of God: 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing' (Galatians 2.20-21).

Fact and Value in Christian Ethics

One difficult knot in Christian ethics that this discussion can help to untie is the distinction between fact and value. In theology as in philosophy individuals are often accused of arriving at an ethical conclusion from a premise which is non-ethical. There is a gap in our moral landscape between what we call statements of description and statements of evaluation—what *is* and what *ought* to be.⁷⁶ Enunciated by Hume and further articulated in G. E. Moore's 'naturalistic fallacy', modern philosophy has been faced with the problem of getting from a logical truth-statement such as 'killing is the taking of human life' to morally charged statements such as 'killing is wrong'. As seen above with the issue of economic justice and human welfare, it is difficult to see how one can get from the fact that balancing the budget

⁷⁵See Charles Taylor, 'Reply to Braybrooke and de Sousa', pp.130-131.

⁷⁶See Chapter 2.

makes for better human welfare to the statement 'human welfare ought to be pursued.'

The rigid distinction between fact and value in the moral realm has left most theological ethicists without a voice.⁷⁷ For the Christian who begins his ethics with the character of God, muddying the waters of fact and value seems almost inescapable. After all even if one were to adhere to a divine command ethic which focuses on certain given truth claims, one must point to some underlying reason for obeying these commands which would invoke the nature of God, i.e., concepts of Holiness, Sovereignty, Goodness, Faithfulness, Love and so on, which are not neutral terms. The Christian ethic, in effect, is disqualified before it even enters the race. Of course, within its own micro community this ethic can function as long as Christians agree on the various value-laden premises, but how can such an insular voice speak to the world? It may be the case that a Christian ethic shares many of the same conclusions that secular ethicists have such as the importance of universal rights and the dignity of the human agent, but for the secular thinker the Christian has short-circuited the process.

When it comes to discourse in the moral arena, to giving a reason for one's view, the Christian must begin with the nature of reality which includes, as I have argued, the realm of the transcendent and the nature of being. Essentially, the Christian must hold a view which is normatively descriptive, or, in other words, where the facts of the matter are pregnant with value.

The difficulty is actually on two levels. First, the Christian must come to see how she or he can become an interlocutor with the secular ethicist working with this kind of framework. Secondly, and partially related, the Christian must understand what it means to give a reason for one's ethical view in such a framework. The two are related by the fact that the second of these is a necessary requirement for

⁷⁷One theologian to address this problem is Helen Oppenheimer. She argues in 'Christian Flourishing', *Religious Studies*, 5, 1969, pp.163-171, that there exist in our world facts that are not 'value-free' among which are the basic claims of Christianity. 'To affirm it is clearly no platitude but involves at least two substantial assumptions: that the basic doctrines of Christianity can indeed be called 'facts'; and that it is indeed possible for facts not to be neutral but to involve claims, for 'is' to have 'ought' built into it.' See also her later article 'Ought and Is', *Theology*, 76, 1973, pp.59-73.

engaging in the first. One must understand how to reason morally before one engages in the exchange.

Taylor's moral ontology alleviates the tension of the fact/value distinction, and by doing so, gives us a better understanding of what it means to give a moral reason for something. One of the claims of his moral ontology, indeed, one of his major ontological premises, is that moral intuitions involve claims about the nature and status of human beings.⁷⁸ As such they cannot be defined in neutral descriptive language, either socio-psychologically or mechanistically. There is a given ontology of the human which shows up in the domain of our moral reactions. This is a part of our reality inasmuch as it is included in our best account of the human moral domain.⁷⁹

From this premise Taylor outlines the nature of moral reasoning. He uses a transcendental argument of the kind Kant used for example in the 'Transcendental Analytic', whereby one starts with an undeniable part of reality and moves to a statement which asserts that the very possibility of this part of reality existing necessarily presupposes that something else actually exists.⁸⁰ What is undeniably real for Taylor is the fact that the human as an embodied agent in the world has a specific ontology which includes strongly valued goods. Several things follow from this including the fact that man is a self-interpreting animal whose existence is defined by value. In terms of moral reasoning what this indicates is that we are all starting our moral conversations from specific paradigms. There are no neutral stances. Moral reasoning is moving from one moral position to another, hopefully better, position. It is reasoning in transition, not from a disengaged standpoint whereby one can logically calculate the pros and cons of a moral choice apart from the subjectivity of one's own personal identity, and then leap back into the moral arena of human agency with a foundationalist decision in hand.

Modern epistemological trends have attempted to assert the claim that one must index any moral reasoning to the bedrock of pure instrumental reasoning or to an indisputable foundation which can be clearly argued. With such an ideology it

⁷⁸See *Sources of the Self*, p.5.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, p.59.

⁸⁰See Charles Taylor, 'The Validity of Transcendental Arguments', in *Philosophical Arguments*.

should be possible for the moral interlocutor to take someone holding a clearly articulated, contrary position, and bring that person through a logical process to an undeniable premise which conflicts with his view thereby converting him in the process.

In Christian ethics this has several implications. If we could logically prove the existence of God in the way Aquinas wants to, then we could bring people to see the importance of God's authority and thereby win a point for Christian moral theory. Logic, however, will not convince anyone who is not already compelled to believe. If this were the case there would be no work for the Holy Spirit. We could function without mystery, relying rather on mathematics.

There is a reality outside of logic, however, and Taylor's argument gives reign to a Christian ethic of transcendence and ontology which has been intellectually oppressed in the 20th century. Realising that there is an undeniable human ontology which Taylor argues has a transcendent dimension, we can go on to say that the Christian programme of defining the human agent includes God as constituting the good in our lives. Furthermore, as human agents within the moral domain, we can understand transcendence not as self-mutilation, but as a freeing of the person from the confines of ordinary life goods. God as constitutive good empowers us to live beyond our ordinary moral obligations.

As such this programme is justified by the nature of an undeniable reality. Taylor's moral ontology indicates that this starting point is a cogent one, that the separation of the evaluative and the descriptive spheres is a doomed enterprise. It also explains that we can feel confident as moral interlocutors holding this position since it is no longer a matter of 'coming clean' about our predispositions in an attempt to cast them off before we begin. In effect Taylor's argument gives the Christian a voice in the moral arena.

CHAPTER EIGHT



The Place of Agape in Moral Ontology

It is left for this investigation to interpret Taylor's moral ontology in light of one of the pivotal features of Christianity. David Tracy has called the phenomenon of Jesus Christ and his Church the story of God's 'Pure Unbounded Love'.¹ This love is arguably the most important dimension of Christian ethics. As Oliver O'Donovan describes it, 'Love is the overall shape of Christian ethics, the form of the human participation in created order.'² Whether one begins with the idea of creation, the community, an eschatological notion of the Kingdom, or the Resurrection of Christ, love will play a central role. It is that quality out of which community arises and creatures are formed. Love is that which when all else has passed away, will remain. It is evoked in both the sacrifice on the Cross and the conquering of death in the Resurrection.

Given that it is universally espoused in Christian ethics, it is ironic that so much confusion abounds concerning love, and particularly agape, that Christian love of the New Testament. This may be due in part to its importance. Love in the Christian context is seen as closely aligned with God, and thus as mysterious, as unknowable. It is that which best describes the relationship between God and human, yet at the same time leaves us with an impoverished definition because of the power

¹See David Tracy, 'The Catholic Model of Caritas: Self-Transcendence and Transformation', *Concilium*, 121, 1979, pp.100-110.

²See O. O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, p.25.

of the actual association. Many theologians would concur with Walter Harrelson who asserts that ‘no one term can adequately express the richness of the God-man relationship—not even agape.’³ Nevertheless, these same theologians also see the importance of exploring this concept, not only to understand and more fully appreciate our relationship with God, but also our relationships with others.

There are even those non-Christian philosophers like Iris Murdoch who see the importance for love in the way we relate to each other. She insists that ‘We need a moral philosophy in which the concept of love, so rarely mentioned now by philosophers, can once again be made central.’⁴ While Charles Taylor agrees with Murdoch’s viewpoint and has even been influenced by her philosophy of love, his place for love in ethics is one which is much more theologically charged. He sees a central and even necessary position for agape in modern moral theories if we are to keep apace with self-imposed moral demands.

Taylor’s concept of agape is intriguing given the role he thinks it must play in secular moral theory. For on the one hand he is closely aligned to the theologian who wants to attribute a primary focus on agape in our ethical formulations. On the other hand, however, given the notion of moral ontology, constitutive goods, and his arguments against procedural ethics, his theory of agape brings out a number of remarkable features which stand against many of the popular theological articulations of agape. This chapter will investigate the Christian understanding of agape and in conclusion examine how Taylor’s place for agape as a constitutive good can add to the discussion of this central feature of Christian ethics.

An Etymological Diversion

Scholars agree that agape has a special place in Biblical Greek, but there is still contention concerning its origins. Some would argue that the term’s theistic connotation is exclusive to the New Testament Koine, while others point to examples

³See Walter J. Harrelson, ‘The Idea of Agape in the New Testament’, *Journal of Religion*, 31, 1951, pp.169-182.

⁴See Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, p.46

such as the Egyptian manuscript 'P Oxy. 1380', which describes Isis with the phrase 'agape theon', to indicate that the New Testament writers were not elevating this term of common love to a higher plane in any unprecedented manner.⁵

It has been assumed that the use of agape emerged as a sacred handing down of the term 'eros' from Classical Greek sources. The classical scholar G. Quispel, echoing the Johannine statement, even argues provocatively that God *is* Eros using texts from Boethius and Dionysius the Areopagite.⁶ The modern understanding of eros, however, usually sets it against the character of agape. The most important example of this is Anders Nygren's *Agape and Eros*.⁷ In this tome the Swedish theologian understands eros as that love which contrary to agape, seeks its own concern rather than the selfless regard for others.

This was not, however, the Greek understanding of the word 'eros'. There is no denying the sexual connotations that the term has in Greek literature. While it is often contrasted with philia, it can also designate a strong desire, or a passionate joy. Furthermore, Eros was the proper name for the personification of love, who, according to Hesiod, was the oldest of the gods.⁸ What reformed theology has taken from the Greek concept of eros, however, is the egoistic tendencies in these connotations such that eros becomes equated with selfishness.

Karl Barth, who was not entirely sympathetic to Nygren's agenda, nevertheless interprets the Greek understanding of eros as fundamentally flawed in this regard.⁹ What Nygren and Barth (as well as others like Bornkamm) did not consider, however, is that the 'Greek love' of Socrates and Plato was essentially a love that 'cared for the other's soul.'¹⁰ Proclus, the 5th century neo-Platonist and

⁵It must be said that in the case of the P Oxy. 1380 manuscript it is highly contested whether or not this text was doctored to include the term to describe the Egyptian goddess. See Stephanie West, 'Alleged pagan use of Agape in P Oxy. 1380', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 18, 1967, pp.142-143, and the opposed opinion of R. E. Witt in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 19, 1968, pp.209-211.

⁶See G. Quispel, 'Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition' in *Théologie historique*, 53, in honorem Robert M. Grant, eds. W. R. Schoedel and R. L. Wilken (Paris: Beauchesne, 1979) pp.189-205.

⁷See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip Watson (London: SPCK, 1953).

⁸Plutarch quotes Parmenides as saying something similar to this in *Lives*, 8 vols., trans. John Langhorne and William Langhorne (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1808) 756F.

⁹See for example, Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1956).

¹⁰See Cornelia J. de Vogel, 'Greek Cosmic love and the Christian Love of God: Boethius, Dionysius the Areopagite and the Author of the Fourth Gospel', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 35:1, 1981, pp.57-81.

commentator on Plato, identifies this love as *ἔρος προνοητικός*. For Socrates and Plato this was their *ἐπιμελεια της ψυχης*, their life duty.¹¹ It was a love which Plato and Socrates demonstrated in the Academy with their care for others. Thus this eros can be understood not only as ‘concupiscence’, but also ‘générosité’.¹²

Eros as a parallel to the New Testament idea of love also took on a more cosmic meaning, both in Classical Greek and in the later neo-Platonic formulations. In this sense it has been argued that like agape, eros is that love which springs from the divine.¹³ While such a concept of eros does not necessarily include the negative connotations of egoism and selfishness that some reformed theologians like Nygren want to argue, it is nevertheless clear that this quality is distinct from the New Testament agape.

For example, the main difference between the eros that Plotinus equates with ‘the One’, and the Christian love revealed by God is that the latter goes out of itself seeking the ‘other’. Its concern is for the well-being of that beyond itself. The One or the Supreme in Plotinus’ *Enneads* is ‘self-absorbed’, concerned only with its own goodness.¹⁴ Intrinsic to this quality is a striving for perfection which cannot be for anything inferior to itself. The love of agape, however, reaches down to the imperfect, the sinner.

Another difference between the love that Jesus was displaying and the Greek notion, particularly of Boethius’ concept of ‘amor’, is that the latter, as a cosmic love, is primarily directed towards the world as a whole, ruling it and keeping it focused as an order. Its concern for the human agent is only secondary.¹⁵ Jesus, on the other hand, was intensely interested in the individual. For him the love of God in both the New and the Old Testaments was primarily directed towards the human agent. So the Christian love of agape is unique in that it flows from perfection with a concern for the imperfect, and it is a personal love which is directed towards human creation.

¹¹See Plato, *Apology*, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (London: Sphere Books, 1970) 29d-30a.

¹²See Cornelia de Vogel, ‘Greek Cosmic love and the Christian Love of God’, p.62.

¹³See G. Quispel, ‘Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition’.

¹⁴See Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI/8,15.

¹⁵See Boethius, *Consolations of Philosophy*, Bk.II, metr.8.

Behind the love of the New Testament is the history of Jesus Christ crucified and risen.

There is no denying the fact that 'agape' as a term has profane origins. Koine Greek is not a sacred language, but merely a spoken rather than prosaic Greek. As terms of love 'agape' and 'agapan' began to replace 'phileia' by the end of the 4th century BC, and by the 2nd century BC 'agapan' was the common word for 'loving' both in spoken and written language.¹⁶ The New Testament writers' employment of the term, however, was such that they broke the boundaries of the everyday concept. They took a word that everyone was familiar with and gave it a quality that was beyond its ordinary meaning.

A Yet More Excellent Way

One of the clearest exegeses of this is the rhetoric of I Corinthians 13, where Paul uses agape in repetitive fashion strictly in terms of the Christian experience. It is that which is qualitatively higher than other goods in the Christian faith. Agape in the end remains as greater than Faith and Hope not because it outlasts them, but because 'Faith and Hope are purely human ... the virtues of creatures. Love is Divine.'¹⁷ Agape here is not spoken of as it is in Galatians 5.22 as one among many Fruits of the Spirit. It is incomparably higher. Three times in the Corinthian letter Paul places agape in a category other than faith, and twice refers to agape as being the essential ingredient of faith in the Christian sense (vs.2,7,13).

Karl Barth's commentary on I Corinthians 13, found in his work *The Resurrection of the Dead*, describes Chapters 12-14 of this letter as God's word of love pronounced to men. Love is that which 'alone never ceases' it is 'placed in

¹⁶See Robert Joly, *Le vocabulaire chrétien de l'amour est-il original? Φιλεῖν et ἀγαπᾶν dans le grec antique* (Brussels: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, 1968). It is interesting to note that agape had become so common that Pseudo-Dionysius considered it too ordinary of a term to describe the love one has for God. See Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names*, cap. iv., § xii, in *Pseudo-Dionysius, The Complete Works*, ed. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) and J. Rist, 'A Note on Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 20, 1966, pp.235-243.

¹⁷See A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1914) p.300.

relation to the seeing of God *face to face* which will take place beyond all time, in the eschatological *tote, then*.¹⁸ The 'way' of agape is 'the divine possibility in all human possibilities'.¹⁹ There is a two-sided relationship developed in agape between God and finite men and women. Love comes from the former, but works in the latter. Paul is not advocating the view in Corinthians that agape is a virtue which the human must strive to obtain. Rather he emphasises, particularly in I Corinthians 13, the work of agape itself. The description is not of someone who loves. It is not that 'someone with love' never fails, but *Love* itself never fails.

This is a clear distinction which should be brought to bear on how we understand love working, particularly in relation to the Pauline view that the Christian is one who has previously died and who now lives in Christ (or in whom Christ now lives). Barth expresses an understanding of this when he contrasts the pattern of behaviour characteristic of agape with that of the human condition. Humans cannot be patient, kind, etc., but agape can.²⁰ Thus it becomes impossible to consider agape as the highest *arete* of humanity. It is not a human achievement, but something beyond the human agent, even 'the deep antithesis to everything that is the essence of natural man.'²¹

If taken to its logical conclusion, however, this can be seen as a theology which forgets the human agent altogether. Agape seems to emerge as an independent person acting for men. God working through us can be interpreted negatively as robbing us of any participation in His love. This may seem to be re-emphasised by the fact that Paul normally speaks of our actions towards God not in terms of love, but in terms of faith (*pistis*).

In both the Pauline and Johannine texts, as well as in the life of Jesus, however, there is a clear place for men and women participating in acts of love. Paul in verses 1-3 of I Corinthians 13 explains agape as that which makes our existence Christian, but nevertheless something that we as new creatures can embrace. No

¹⁸See Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. H. J. Stenning (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1933) p.71.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 83.

²⁰See *ibid.*, p.85.

²¹See Günther Bornkamm, 'Der köstlichere Weg I. Kor 13', *Jahrbuch der Theologischen Schule Bethel*, Vol. 8, 1937, pp.132ff., reprinted in *Das Ende dees Gesetzes*, Paulusstudien, Vol. I, of collected essays (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1961) p.101.

deeds however splendid are Christian unless they are grounded in agape, unless they are constituted by this good. John in his first book emphasises the inverse of this: we cannot love with words alone, we must love in action and in truth. So there is a bipolar dynamic being described in the New Testament concept of agape whereby it finds its origin in God, indeed is equated with God, while at the same time is created in the good works that we do towards our neighbour, and relies on correct praxis as well as belief.

The Life and teachings of Jesus are given in stark contrast to our normal way of conceiving love. Jesus not only proclaims that the most important commandments are that one should 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind' and 'Love your neighbour as yourself', but through the Incarnation he fulfilled these commandments through the New Covenant. It is significant that the two love commandments that Jesus answered the Pharisee with were taken from the Old Testament, so that this Greek term agape is linked now to the history of God's love for Israel.

One of the most powerful references to this love is in Hosea 11.1ff.: 'When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.' But Israel is a son who rebels against God: 'the more I called Israel the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.' The image of Yahweh's love for His people is one which has compassion even when Israel is not seeking Him: 'How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim.'

The classic reference to God's relationship with Israel is Deuteronomy 7.7-8:

'The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.'

As Jeremiah so poignantly describes this love Yahweh has for His people it is a covenant love, one that issues forth from a jealous and holy God (31.3ff.).

The distinctive difference between this love and the agape God shows in the New Testament is the Cross. 'God commends his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us' (Romans 5.8). In the New Testament the purpose of Yahweh with Israel can be seen as fulfilled in Christ. A new people of God is created. In Christ the New Covenant is disclosed. One cannot deny that in this New Covenant we are called to love God (Romans 8.28). This love is a love gladly and ecstatically proclaimed, evoked by the purpose of God for His people. It is a love 'which has found its centre and fulfilment in the death and resurrection of the Anointed One.'²²

The significance of this is that agape is a fulfilling gift to a race of creatures who cannot possibly attain what is demanded of them without it. The origin of this love can never be forgotten. This is clear in the Old Testament source of the command concerning neighbour love. In Leviticus 19.18, this second command to love our neighbour as ourselves is issued as part of the Holiness Code: the Israelite is not to hate his brother in his heart, not to avenge or hold a grudge, etc. The conclusion of this is 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself; I am Yahweh'. The fact that it is Yahweh who speaks and identifies Himself as the relevant authority of the command reflects the importance of the divine source of this love. While in the Old Testament Covenant more emphasis is placed on the ontic dimension of this command (the individual is to love his neighbour as one under the same covenant, but were he not chosen and loved by Yahweh, the command would be void), with the Incarnation, the focus is suddenly shifted to the ontological dimension of Christ as Agape. The sustainer and creator of love has brought a New Covenant to His people whereby those to be included are not just the Children of Israel but all 'those who are lost.' The neighbour is now the sinner, the poor, the lame, the blind, and the sick—anyone who stands in need of the love of the New Covenant. In doing this Christ is extending back beyond the Covenant made with Israel to the very act of creation.

²²See Walter J. Harrelson, 'The Idea of Agape in the New Testament', p.176.

This love of God for His people in the New Covenant is one which Nygren describes as spontaneous and without cause. There is no quality in the beloved which evokes this love. God in the New Covenant does not love the sinner because he is worthy of this love—it is a love indifferent to human merit. Nygren uses the Johannine and Pauline texts as well as the Gospel to argue this case.

Jesus says ‘I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners’ (Matthew 9.13). The Parables of the Prodigal Son and the Labourers in the Vineyard demonstrate that the love God has for us is one which firstly, is infinitely beyond any good we deserve, and secondly, is not reliant on any merit we may strive to obtain. ‘When God gives His love freely and for nothing, there remains nothing for man to gain by loving God. His love for God loses the character of a deserving achievement and becomes pure and unfeigned. It flows by inescapable necessity from the fact of his belonging unreservedly to God; and being aware of so belonging, it devotes its whole attention to the carrying out of God’s will.’²³

Nygren’s Understanding of Divine Agape

Most modern theological renditions of agape rely on the New Testament, but given this common source it is nevertheless interesting to note the distinct lack of consensus regarding the nature of love. The divide is no longer across a straightforward Protestant/Catholic line, though there are certain features that can be described as primarily Protestant and others which are more in keeping with traditional Catholic considerations. Many of the issues for modern theologians begin in Systematics, but in investigating the normative content of agape, spill over into the world of Christian ethics. Questions arise concerning not only the nature of God’s love, but its relation to us and our love for others and ourselves.

Barth, Tillich, Niebuhr, and Outka have all discussed Nygren’s treatment of agape as an important watershed in modern Christian ethics. Nygren lists four features of God’s love that he considers to be essential. First, it is a love that is

²³See Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, pp.94-95.

wholly spontaneous and ‘unmotivated’.²⁴ Agape has no ulterior or exterior motive outside itself. Secondly, God’s love is completely indifferent to value. This assertion goes beyond saying that God’s love is a ‘transvaluation of all values’. Rather, true love rejects any notion of valuation whatsoever. Otherwise it would not be spontaneous and unmotivated.²⁵ Thirdly, Nygren argues that God’s love is ‘creative’, that instead of transforming any value into a greater value, it creates value *ex nihilo*. Nygren thinks that this is the most important reason for the uniqueness of agape:

‘God does not love that which is already in itself worthy of love, but on the contrary, that which in itself has no worth acquires worth just by becoming the object of God’s love. Agape has nothing to do with the kind of love that depends on the recognition of a valuable quality in its object; Agape does not recognise value, but creates it. Agape loves, and imparts value by loving. The man who is loved by God has no value in himself; what gives him value is precisely the fact that God loves him. *Agape is a value-creating principle.*’²⁶

Fourthly, agape is the ‘initiator of fellowship’ with God. It is through God’s love that He reveals himself to us. The individual by his own efforts cannot know Him; the relationship must be divinely instigated. Not only is it considered necessary that our *knowledge* of God comes from God’s love, but our *love* for others must originate there as well. ‘We love because he first loved us’ (I John 4.19).

Agape in the sphere of human relationships has the same normative characteristics as it does in the realm of the God-human encounter. So Karl Barth emphasises that agape has a dimension of self-sacrifice or *Hingabe*, self-giving.²⁷ ‘In *agape*-love a man gives himself to another with no expectation of a return, in a pure venture, even at the risk of ingratitude, of his refusal to make a response of love.’²⁸

²⁴Ibid., p.75.

²⁵Ibid., pp.77-78.

²⁶Ibid., p.78. Author’s italics.

²⁷See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1958) p.828.

²⁸Ibid., IV/2:745.

Neighbour Love

Not everyone understands the two love commandments as identified in this way. William Frankena in his work *Ethics*, for example, has argued that the first command asserts a *religious* obligation, while the second asserts a moral.²⁹ Certainly one of the most significant questions which has arisen is to what extent our love for our neighbours reflects the love God has for us. Most, like Gene Outka, would define neighbour love in terms which include an 'other-regarding' principle. 'Agape is a regard for the neighbour which in crucial respects is independent and unalterable.'³⁰

Regard for others, like God's love for us, has in it the idea of independence. It implies that our love for the neighbour is to be unconditional. It is irrespective of persons in both its universality and in specific cases. Nor does it arise from, or is proportional to, any quality of the neighbour, including the neighbour's actions towards us. In this way there is neither favouritism nor prejudice in agape.

It also involves permanent stability: it is not wavering. Regardless of what the other does, agape will remain. This may mean that forgiveness will be a price to pay in some situations where the neighbour injures the one who loves.

Nygren thinks that agape is 'a lost love' (*eine verloren Liebe*) that does not consider 'success in the end'. It does not cease even with impending betrayal or failure.³¹ As such agape can be seen as contrasted with extreme instrumental reason which sees the other as objects to be manipulated for one's gain. Breaking out of this mind-set means seeing the other as irreducibly valuable, both as a person (rather than as a *kind* of person) and as one whose well-being is as important as my own.

O'Donovan incorporates this into his understanding of the love-command:

'True neighbourliness requires the recognition of the supreme good simply in order that we may see the neighbour for what he is. But that means that our pursuit of the neighbour's welfare has to take seriously

²⁹See William Frankena, *Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963). I would argue that Frankena is typical in treating the 'moral' too narrowly here. Unquestionable are the many connections between the religious and the moral spheres, and these commandments surely are two of the most significant examples if we are to treat morality not merely as the realm concerned with right actions, but also the significant goods in our lives.

³⁰See Gene Outka, *Agape*, p.9. I am indebted to Outka's thorough analysis of the Agape literature for this chapter.

³¹See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, pp.731-733.

the thought that he, like ourselves, is a being whose end is in God. To “love” him without respecting this fundamental truth about him would be an exercise in fantasy. Saint Augustine used to say that our first duty to the neighbour was to “seize him for God”. This does not mean, as some critics would pretend to warn us, that every gesture or act of love towards the neighbour will have a religious goal as an “ulterior motive”. It means simply that there is, in our love for the neighbour, a recognition of his high calling and destiny to fellowship with God and a desire to further that destiny in the context of concern for his welfare.³²

One of the ways that Taylor can be brought alongside the theologian at this stage is by examining what he calls a ‘disencapsulated respect’ for the human being. By attempting to understand how it is that we should engage in moral reasoning with seemingly incommensurable viewpoints, he argues that one point of common ground may be the importance of the human being in a culture:

‘In many cultures, this sense of the special importance of the human being is encapsulated in religious and cosmological outlooks, and connected views of human social life, which turn it in directions antithetical to modern rights doctrine ... The rights doctrine presents human importance in a radical form, one that is hard to gainsay. This affirmation can be taken on several levels. ... One that seems plausible to me goes something like this: recurrently in history, new doctrines have been propounded which called on their adherents to move toward a relatively greater respect for human beings, one by one, at the expense of previously recognised forms of social encapsulation. This has been generally true of what people refer to as the higher religion. ... Disencapsulated respect for the human seems to say something to us humans.’³³

The doctrine of universal rights can be interpreted as a good which is essentially linked with agape as other-regard. One is called to put value in a person *qua* human being, loving her as a significant other, affirming her authenticity in our love. The importance for a disencapsulated agape in Taylor’s mind is that it allows one to see his or her own view as one among many possibilities. When this happens one is free to affirm the authenticity of various human life forms in different cultures and ways. By doing this one understands them sympathetically (while not necessarily

³²*Resurrection and Moral Order*, p.229.

³³See Taylor, ‘Explanation and Practical Reason’, pp.56-57

empathetically) and therefore has a better grasp of the human condition. Through this understanding one can love more fully.

One criticism, however, is that by disencapsulating in this way, one is still in the realm of encapsulation. Absolute disencapsulation is analogous to attempting an epistemological view from nowhere. Because we are defined culturally, spiritually, and psychologically in certain terms, we are bound to some form of encapsulation. Our attention, therefore, must be focused on encapsulation as conceived in terms of agape. What is called for is not necessarily a disencapsulation, but a transcendent encapsulation which stems from God. Seeing the other as valuable goes beyond human dignity to what O'Donovan describes as seeing the other as 'a being whose end is in God,' as cited above. As such agape is that source encompassing the character of God's love for us. Taylor, himself, agrees with this idea of Christian love. He recognises that the aim of agape '... is to associate oneself with, to become in a sense a channel of, God's love for men, which is seen as having the power to heal the divisions among men and take them beyond what they usually recognise as the limits to their love for one another.'³⁴

'Who is My Neighbour?'

Seeing who the 'other' might be is not always clear. The term 'neighbour' has been given a wide-range of interpretations from those in our immediate vicinity to anyone in the global community in need of love. Karl Barth in places argues for an exclusivist understanding of agape. It is that which is practised in the community of Christian believers, and does not include the feature of universality.³⁵ Our neighbours therefore are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Kierkegaard on the other hand says that love is 'a characteristic by which or in virtue of which you exist for others.'³⁶ By this he means it is unalterable, unchanging, that it does not depend upon the features

³⁴'The Diversity of Goods', in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, p.234.

³⁵See Gene Outka's discussion of Barth in *Agape*, pp.210ff.

³⁶See Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962) p.211.

of the other. Clearly for this to be so, there is an ontological precedent which identifies the neighbour for us. For Kierkegaard, the designation of the person as human agent existing in our world is the criterion for him or her being our neighbour. In this no distinction is allowed:

‘The category *neighbour* is just like the category human being. Every one of us is a human being and at the same time the heterogeneous individual which he is by particularity; but being a human being is the fundamental qualification No one should be preoccupied with the differences so that he cowardly or presumptuously forgets that he is a human being; no man is an exception to being a human being by virtue of his particularising differences. He is rather a human being and then a particular human being.’³⁷

It is not only this distinction of person *qua* human being that Kierkegaard finds important to identifying the neighbour. In addition to this, indeed preceding this, is the person *qua* individual relating to God. My neighbour is my neighbour by mere fact that we both stand in equal relationship to God. Thus, ‘your neighbour is every man, for in the basis of distinction he is not your neighbour, nor on the basis of likeness to you as being different from other men. He is your neighbour on the basis of equality with you before God: but this equality absolutely every man has, and he has it absolutely.’³⁸

Donald Evans makes the point that in such recognition of my neighbour there is a degree of poesis, of constituting the other as my neighbour, as the object of love. Making the decision *that* someone is my brother is also making the decision to look on someone as my brother. It is both attitudinal and intentional in nature. It is also oriented towards someone rather than a quality which inheres in the agent.³⁹

Clearly there are two concepts here that Taylor is extremely sympathetic towards. First, Kierkegaard’s universalising of the category of neighbour is in complete accord with Taylor’s politics of recognition which seeks to affirm the other’s humanity and authenticity in a spirit of universal respect.⁴⁰ Secondly, Evans’ notion that seeing the other as my neighbour constitutes him as such aligns itself with

³⁷Ibid., p.142.

³⁸Ibid., p.72.

³⁹See Donald Evans, *The Logic of Self-Involvement* (London: SCM Press, 1963) p.129.

⁴⁰See Chapter 5.

Taylor's idea of constitutive goods and the expressivist nature of articulation.⁴¹ According to Taylor *agape* empowers us to see the other as good in a way that is parallel to the genesis account of God *seeing* creation as good. '*Agape* is inseparable from such a "seeing-good",' and as such substantiates the other as neighbour.⁴²

Almost all theologians would agree with the Johannine texts (e.g., I John 4.20) which emphasise that part of what it means to love God is loving one's neighbour. Disagreements arise, however, as to how much of the love for God is substantiated by our love for each other. Some would argue that neighbour-love is *all* the content that 'love for God' entails. They reason that this is sufficient for normative ethics since '*Agape* as an other-regarding principle has only the neighbour for its object, but not God in a way substantively applicable to the making of moral judgements. On occasion it is even held that little more need be said about religious belief itself.'⁴³

Outka distinguishes love for God and love for our neighbour by pointing to the fact that we are forbidden to love the latter to the point of worship. Thus there must be some qualitative difference between the love we are expected to have for God and the love we have for our neighbours. Loving our neighbours to distraction in this way, however, can be seen as a transgression of degree rather than of kind. If I love my beloved more than God, it is not necessarily that I love her too much, but only in relation to God. The sin is in loving the creator of this love incompletely, loving God too little. The question must be asked whether an excess of love can ever be love at all. Nevertheless, it must be recognised, as Outka does, that 'The material continuity is far greater between divine love and neighbour-love than between love for God and neighbour-love.'⁴⁴

⁴¹See Chapter 1.

⁴²*Sources of the Self*, p.516.

⁴³See Gene Outka, *Agape*, p.45.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p.48.

Love and Faith

Because of the difficulty of aligning these two loves Nygren proposes that in place of love for God we substitute faith. 'Faith includes in itself the whole devotion of love, while emphasising that it has the character of response, that it is reciprocated love. Faith is love towards God, but a love of which the keynote is receptivity, not spontaneity.'⁴⁵

This argument of Nygren's is a linguistic one which takes everything involved in the love for God and places it under the umbrella of Faith. The problem with this view, however, is that by definition neighbour-love would then exhaust the content of agape. What surfaces here is a question surrounding receptivity and spontaneity. Nygren is suspicious of any human spontaneity in relation to God. He develops a distinction between an ethic of 'causality' and an ethic of 'teleology', whereby only the latter can accommodate any kind of anthropocentric spontaneity.⁴⁶ His view on the other hand is one which only allows for receptivity: 'God's love invades the human sphere, but never in such fashion that there is any gradual accretion of power at the agent's own disposal, proper to him as such.'⁴⁷ This 'causal' scheme has sometimes been interpreted as a kind of 'irresistible grace' which leaves the creature in a state of utter passivity. It has been a feature of Nygren's ethics which has been highly criticised—defining the human agent as a kind of 'tube ... through which God's love flows.'⁴⁸

Outka, commenting on Nygren's view, recognises that arguing for God's love as a source of man's love 'may simply mean that the basis is outside man's own power of initiation and sustenance; it can also mean that the subject is actually God in all genuine neighbour-love. Nygren appears to mean both.'⁴⁹ What Outka rightly argues for in contrast to this view is the inability to make such a distinction as

⁴⁵See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p.127.

⁴⁶See for example, *ibid.*, p.737.

⁴⁷See Gene Outka, *Agape*, pp.49-50.

⁴⁸See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, p.735.

⁴⁹Gene Outka, *Agape*, p.50.

receptivity and spontaneity.⁵⁰ An active response to God shares with neighbour love the idea of self-giving and this certainly is part of loving God. There are two ways that Outka sees God entering into our moral realm. First, in affecting the content of our love for others itself, and second in discrete attitudes and actions ‘whose very intelligibility (to the believer at least) depends on their not being reducible to neighbour-love.’⁵¹

Concerning our love for God, Barth is uneasy with Nygren equating love for God with faith and takes a view more in line with Catholic thinking. For Barth there is a ‘distinctive creaturely freedom in relation to God’ which the individual can use in the act of giving himself to God, of being disposed in this way. Love for God is in no way completely absorbed by our love for our neighbour:

‘Though a man cannot for a moment withdraw from his obligation to his neighbour by fleeing to a special religious sphere, and though there exist neither general human undertakings nor particular pious practices by which he could and should gain, augment or preserve the divine good-pleasure, yet only on the basis of a very strained exegesis of Mk. 12:29f., and its parallels could we say that the commandment to love our neighbour in some sense absorbs that to love God and takes away its independent quality. The truth is rather that the double command to love points us to two spheres of activity which are relatively—no more, but very clearly so—distinct.’⁵²

Agape and Self-Sacrifice

In an attempt to make some distinction between divine and human love, Nygren sets up the dichotomy of agape and eros essentially following Luther’s contrast of *amor dei/amor hominis*. Nygren sees agape and eros as fundamentally different forms of love, opposed and incohabitable. Eros begins with the sense of need; it is based upon a recognition of value. As such it is thoroughly egocentric. In essence, eros originates with the human agent, agape with God. ‘The agape of God,

⁵⁰Ibid., pp.50ff.

⁵¹Ibid., p.52.

⁵²See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4, trans. A. T. MacKay, et al. (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1961) pp.48-49.

expressed in Christ and his Cross, awakens in man gratitude and self-giving.⁵³ According to Nygren it was only with Luther that the true distinction of agape and eros began to break through after having been corrupted, particularly by Augustine's notion of *caritas*.

Kierkegaard too is extremely pejorative in discussing what Nygren identifies as eros. Preferential relationships of the kind found in erotic love or friendship are flawed in the perspective of agape. They are steeped in suspicion, concern for one's own welfare, and vulnerability. 'In this suspicion ... lies hidden the anxiety which makes erotic love and friendship dependent upon their objects, the anxiety which can kindle jealousy, the anxiety which can bring one to despair.'⁵⁴ This kind of love which seeks reciprocity Kierkegaard sees as incompatible with Christian love.⁵⁵ Christian love involves self-sacrifice, not expectations from the beloved.

Niebuhr has taken up the link between agape and self-sacrifice in his Christian 'realism'. In his view pride and self-love seem interchangeable at times so that we must sacrifice the latter in order to avoid the sin of the former. To this extent Niebuhr argues for a justification of agape as self-sacrifice: the ideal content of agape for him is frictionless harmony, but in this world of power-struggles and egoism, the purest expression of love becomes self-denial. This, however, is not necessarily the correct response to this situation:

'The perfect disinterestedness of the divine love can have a counterpart in history only in a life which ends tragically, because it refuses to participate in the claims and counter-claims of historical existence. It portrays a love "which seeketh not its own." But a love which seeketh not its own is not able to maintain itself in historical society. Not only may it fall victim to excessive forms of the self-assertion of other; but even the most perfectly balanced system of justice in history is a balance of competing wills and interests, and must therefore worst anyone who does not participate in the balance.'⁵⁶

⁵³See Richard Harries, 'Review of Anders Nygren's *Agape and Eros*', *King's Theological Review*, 7, 1984, pp.23-24.

⁵⁴See Soren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, p.78.

⁵⁵See *ibid.*, p.59.

⁵⁶See Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, II:72.

For Niebuhr the ideal love is at the opposite end of the spectrum from the 'conflict of life with life.'⁵⁷ The picture that Niebuhr evokes is almost one where pure love is powerless in a world dominated by power. It brings to mind the words of George Herbert describing in the persona of Jesus his attempt through love alone to move the accusing crowd ready to crucify him:

*I answer nothing, but with patience prove
If stonie hearts will melt with gentle love.
But who does hawk at eagles with a dove?
Was ever grief like mine?'*⁵⁸

What Niebuhr's realism claims is that ideal love because it is ideal cannot be applied to the world of contesting interests and self-centredness and still remain ideal love. It must be tempered with other virtues, particularly justice, in order for us to engage in this arena. As Robin Gill has commented, relating this back to Luther's theology, the problem with insisting on an ethic based solely on agape is that Christian businessmen for example, 'are not working in a society composed solely of sincere Christians and, if they were to follow the injunctions of the Sermon on the Mount literally, their business would probably collapse ...'.⁵⁹

Niebuhr sees a need to re-adjust our sights in a way that prevents us from attempting to achieve heaven here on earth. 'I have never criticised a statesman for responsibly seeking to maintain a tolerable peace or establish a tolerable justice,' he claims, while going on to add, 'I have criticised the Christian perfectionists who either claimed that these tasks could be accomplished more perfectly by the "love method" or who have sought to prove that their love was "perfect", even if they had to disavow responsibilities to preserve its perfection.' He further concludes:

'I have never insisted on a sharp distinction between sacrificial and mutual love, that is, between the love which is, and which is not, reciprocated and historically justified. I have only criticised the tendency to identify these two facets of love completely, so that the New Testament ethic is reduced to the limits of a prudential ethics, according to which we are counselled to forgive our foe because he will then cease to be our foe; and are promised that if suffering love

⁵⁷See Harry R. Davis and Robert C. Good, eds., *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics* (New York: Scribner's, 1960) p. 136.

⁵⁸See George Herbert, *Poems Selected by W.H. Auden* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1973) p.38.

⁵⁹See Robin Gill, *A Textbook of Christian Ethics* (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1985) p.222.

becomes sufficiently general it will cease to be “suffering” and change society into a harmony of life in which no one need suffer.⁶⁰

Niebuhr’s idea that agape lies in the realm of the other-worldly, of the eschatologically ideal, includes a notion of the self which has a final longing for God. It is a dimension within the human person which longs for this transcendent fulfilment. The role agape can play in this arena is one which tempers our natural inclinations to egoistic self-interestedness. We need to see beyond the self, to be aware of the needs of others, to identify with them and so acknowledge their just claims. There is a sense in which, according to Niebuhr’s account, we cannot obtain anything like agape, but can still get glimpses which encourage us to love. Agape is a good, yet one which is impossible to realise in this world. Its existence is real, but beyond our grasp.

One of the greatest problems in approaching agape is assuming a stance whereby we set up ‘disinterestedness’ or ‘other-regard’ or ‘unconditionality’ or ‘self-denial’ as criteria in an attempt to establish a formula for success. The tendency is to think that if one achieves ‘disinterestedness’ or absolute ‘self-abnegation’ one will have grasped true agape. We cannot, however, deny the self, as a recipe for love. The difficulty with this is that it assumes that if we can only possess some of the trappings of agape we will have achieved this love itself. What someone like Niebuhr helps us to understand is that agape breaks out of any kind of criteria-based definition in this way.

Taylor would agree with Niebuhr in claiming that there is no simple procedural ethic involved. Any attempt at one will end in self-abnegation, but of a kind which is diametrically opposed to the good of agape. The power of such a love is that it fulfils one’s self, creates meaning with others as with God. If it is truly understood there should be no danger of self-mutilation.⁶¹ For this very reason one cannot side with those who see any notion of self-fulfilment as anti-love.

⁶⁰See Reinhold Niebuhr, ‘Reply to Interpretation and Criticism,’ in *Reinhold Niebuhr*, eds. Charles Kegley and Robert Bretall (New York: Macmillan, 1961) p.442.

⁶¹See Appendix D.

Agape as Mutuality

Recognising this has led some to advocate a theory of agape based on mutuality. Stephen Post sees reciprocity as sustaining agape. Christian love for him is conceived as 'mutuality between God, self, and neighbour, primarily situated within the fellowship of believers and deeply informed by tradition.'⁶² Martin Buber is perhaps one of this century's most profound voices on this theme. For him one's own integrity is vitally important in a loving relationship. The self must be self-affirming or friendship of any kind is impossible.⁶³ A relationship should involve mutual action and respect. Neither side is consuming or abnegating or alternatively worshipping or aggrandising the other.

Some consider mutuality not merely a possible state of affairs, but a necessary one. Robert Johann, for example, using the language of Buber, thinks that one must have the possibility of response from the other in order to love that other, for only then can that person be a *thou* which, he argues, is a prerequisite for this kind of personal relationship.⁶⁴ It is understandable that one would want to argue for such a possibility. Unrequited love leads to feelings of rejection, and humans need to feel valued by others. On another level entirely, one can see in this picture another *Thou* who shows this responsiveness in pure actualisation. He is the One whose love for us is perfectly realised. What is entailed in the Christian belief is the love of one who *is* Love, and who responds without failure.

Mutuality as an alternative theory to the Nygren/Kierkegaard approach is discussed by Outka both in terms of personal relations and social interaction.⁶⁵ Love in these situations refers to something between two persons which establishes or enhances some sort of exchange between the parties. Some would argue that an agape which considers mutuality important is an ideal basis for community. But

⁶²See Stephen Post, *A Theory of Agape: On the Meaning of Christian Love* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1990) p.10.

⁶³See Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Kegan Paul, 1947) pp.29-30.

⁶⁴See Robert Johann, *The Meaning of Love* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1955) pp.65-66.

⁶⁵See Gene Outka, *Agape*, pp.36ff.

problems arise with the concept of mutuality since it involves self-interest, something that has been opposed by traditional understandings of agape.

The problem of self-love and agape is perhaps one of the most divisive in modern Christian ethics. Traditional statements regarding our love for God have run along the lines of the French Theologian Fénelon who thought that perfect love for God would desire nothing for its own sake except God's will be done.⁶⁶ On the other hand, there have been classic Christian pronouncements on the subject which have accepted a place for self-love. According to Bernard of Clairvaux there are four stages of love: first we love ourselves, then come to love God for what He can do for us, afterwards we love God for His own sake, and finally in heaven we come to love even ourselves for His sake as perfection of love.⁶⁷

Outka, in an attempt to argue against letting the other completely dominate you in the name of agape, finds that one needs a proper sense of self-love in order for agape to be realised. 'Love your neighbour as yourself' implies not only a command to love the neighbour, but one to love the self as well.⁶⁸ Not all self-love is justifiable, however, and Outka distinguishes between four distinct kinds. First there is the self-love as wholly nefarious, the type of love that Niebuhr condemns as being linked to pride and sin—a culpable selfishness. This is the love Nygren has identified with an entire 'Eros-religion' and 'Eros-ethics' which is governed by self-seeking.⁶⁹ 'When ... Paul sets self-love and neighbourly love in opposition to one another, he is not condemning merely a "lower self-love," or the natural propensity to self-assertion, but all self-love whatsoever, even in its most highly spiritual forms.'⁷⁰

Secondly, there is self-love as prudent and normal. This view is one which sees people as naturally inclined to love themselves, but in a way that is *amoral*. It does not even concern the individual. Bultmann remarks that 'It is ... stupid to say ...

⁶⁶See for example, François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon, *Explication des maximes des saints sur la vie intérieure* (Paris: Aubouin, Emery, et Clousier, 1697), and *Oeuvres de Fénelon, Arch évêque de Cambrai, précédées d'études sur sa vie*, par M. Aimé-Martin. Tome II (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1838).

⁶⁷See, Bernard of Clairvaux, *L'amour de Dieu: La grace et le livre arbitre*, eds. Françoise Callerot et al. (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1993), and *Love without measure: extracts from the writings of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, ed. Paul Diemer (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1990).

⁶⁸See Gene Outka, *Agape*, pp.21-23.

⁶⁹See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, pp.208-210.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p.131.

that a justifiable self-love, a necessary standard of self-respect, must precede love of neighbour, since the command runs “love your neighbour *as yourself*.” Self love is thus presupposed, ... but not as something which man needs to learn, which must be expressly required of him.⁷¹

Thirdly, self-love may be a paradigm which indicates how other love should be. Paul Ramsey thinks that self-love is an index to the proper regard for others:

‘How exactly do you love yourself? Answer this question and you will know how a Christian should love his neighbour. You naturally love yourself for your own sake. You wish your own good, and you do so even when you may have a certain distaste for the kind of person you are. Liking yourself or thinking yourself very nice, or not, has fundamentally nothing to do with the matter. After a failure of some sort, the will-to-live soon returns and you always lay hold expectantly on *another* possibility of attaining some good for yourself. You love yourself more than you love any good qualities or worth you may possess. Unsubdued by bad qualities, not elicited by good ones, self-love does not wait on worth. In fact it is the other way around: self-love makes you desire worth for yourself. Regardless of fluctuations in feeling, you love yourself on one day about as much as on any other. And regardless of differences in temperament or capacity for deep emotion, one person probably wishes his own good about as much as another person wishes for his.’⁷²

Finally, self-love may be a kind of blessing or fruition of the self which benefits ‘other-regard’. Blessing of the self in this way must be unintended or epiphenomenal in order for it not to be rapacious. Niebuhr mentions this kind of paradox in seeking after love in this way: ‘consistent self-seeking is bound to be self-defeating; on the other hand, self-giving is bound to contribute ultimately to self-realisation.’⁷³

Self-love is justified by some as a derivative of *love for others* in this way. Some would argue that even if it cannot be considered praiseworthy in itself it needs to be considered as far as the agent’s own welfare is concerned, providing that it can be procured from a love for one’s neighbour. Thus Ramsey argues that ‘Some

⁷¹See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith and Erminie Huntress Lantero (New York: Scribner’s, 1958) p.116.

⁷²See Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1953) pp.99-100.

⁷³See Reinhold Niebuhr, *Man’s Nature and His Communities* (New York: Scribner’s, 1965) pp.106-107. See also his *Faith and History* (London: Nisbet, 1949) pp. 176-179.

definition of legitimate concern for the self must be given, even if only as a secondary and derivative part of Christian ethics. For certainly as a part of vocational service grounded in Christian love for neighbour, an individual has great responsibility for the development and use of all his natural capacities, or else he takes responsibility for rashly throwing them away.⁷⁴

Others, however, are not satisfied with seeing self-love as a spin-off of other-regard. D'Arcy, for example, thinks that agape is just as corruptible as self-regarding love and argues for a balance of the two: 'Selfishness is only a vice if it means an undue regard for self; unselfishness is only a virtue if it is countered by self-respect. The two loves, therefore, so far from being opposites appear to require the presence of each other.'⁷⁵

For Robert Johann, there is an obligation, or almost an inescapability to self-love. I cannot love the other in addition to loving myself, but rather in loving the other I am fully myself. 'The commandment to love universally is not something imposed on us from outside; it is simply a formulation of the very exigencies of our beings as persons.'⁷⁶

This comes close to the way Taylor understands self-love particularly in his view that fulfilment and self-authenticating experiences are intricately linked to those around us. We depend on our neighbours for the fullness of love.⁷⁷

Love in a Different Voice

No one collective group has had more to say in recent years about self-love and its place in agape than the feminist movement in theology. Feminism criticises as too exclusive most of the major theories of agape in the 20th century which stress

⁷⁴See Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*, p.159.

⁷⁵See M. C. D'Arcy, *Mind and Heart of Love* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955) p.308.

⁷⁶See Robert Johann, 'Love and Justice' in *Ethics and Society*, ed. Richard T. de George (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) p.40.

⁷⁷Of course one other way to understand self love is as a celebration of creation as well as an act which brings our response to creation into line with God's own attitude towards it. If God loves us as creatures, then refusing any part in self-love amounts to denying the good which has been created. If we do not love what God loves we will not be loving God.

other-regard to the point of self-sacrifice. It argues that a better understanding of agape is mutuality. In doing so feminist theologians are much more sympathetic to Catholic thinkers like D'Arcy as opposed to their Protestant counterparts such as Nygren and Niebuhr.⁷⁸

Not only do they consider mutuality to be a better way of describing agape, but they see it as healthier for women. They argue that agape as traditionally understood (as self-denial) reflects a largely male experience. As early as 1960 Valerie Saiving Goldstein asserted this claim: 'Contemporary theological doctrines of love have, I believe, been constructed primarily upon the basis of masculine experience and thus view the human condition from the male standpoint. Consequently, these doctrines do not provide an adequate interpretation of the situation of women—nor for that matter, of men ...'.⁷⁹ According to Goldstein the basis for this argument lies in the psychological differences between men and women which develop as they are nurtured. Men are born from and nurtured by women, but do not share the biological identity of those who are nurturing them and so cannot freely adopt the mother as a role model. This creates anxiety which Goldstein argues men respond to with self-love and pride. For women, however, there is no anxiety since they can completely identify with the role of biological mother. 'Such passive acceptance of biological destiny does not engender anxiety, rather it fosters a sloth which causes women to neglect their own development as persons. Hence the sins to which women as women are prone are faults such as distractibility, sentimentality, violation of privacy, excessive dependence, and "lack of an organising centre"'.⁸⁰

Because women have a tendency to give themselves over to the other, they lose their own identity more easily, or, alternatively, that identity is much more strongly rooted in other people. From this it is argued that 'the virtues which theologians should be urging upon women as women are autonomy and self-realisation.'⁸¹ Whether through nature or cultural conditioning, it is true that women

⁷⁸See for example, Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, 'Agape in Feminist Ethics', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 9, 1981, pp.69-83.

⁷⁹See Valerie Saiving Goldstein, 'The Human situation: a feminine view,' reprinted in Carol P. Christ and Judith Plasko, eds., *Womanspirit Rising* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980) p.27.

⁸⁰See Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, 'Agape in Feminist Ethics', p.74.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, p.74.

are more prone to destructive self-abnegation. The widow, for example, often feels her identity is lost when she no longer has a husband to do things for, to give herself to. The widower may too feel the same loss, but for different reasons.

Feminists in the 19th century such as the suffragette Elizabeth Cady Stanton realised that excessive selflessness in women (imposed *by* men) was one of the primary engines driving their own oppression. 'Men think that self-sacrifice is the most charming of all the cardinal virtues for women ... and in order to keep it in healthy working order they make opportunities for its illustration as often as possible.'⁸² Mary Daly, one of the most articulate voices in the feminist movement in the 1970's, remarked that 'there has been a *theoretical* one-sided emphasis upon charity, meekness, obedience, humility, self-abnegation, sacrifice, service. Part of the problem with this moral ideology is that it became accepted not by men, but by women, who hardly have been helped by an ethic which reinforces the abject female situation.'⁸³

Rosemary Radford Ruether, among others, has argued that damage has been done by the bifurcation of human experience to man's world and woman's place. Niebuhr's division of public and private space whereby the agape of self-sacrifice is assigned to the realm of the latter has contributed to the detriment of women simply because traditionally this is the arena in which women have been confined—the home.⁸⁴ Ruether adds that 'This split between the public realm of work as the sphere of material relations and functional rationality and the "home" as the feminine sphere of morality and sentiment had a devastating effect on both women and the quality of public culture.'⁸⁵

The majority of feminist thinkers do not want to deny the importance of self-sacrifice. Rather, what is to be challenged is the assumption that men have the power over women to shape an ethic *for* women. What is called for is the affirmation of a pluralism of goods in a Christian ethic of love, one which does not necessarily

⁸²See Elizabeth Cady Stanton et al., *The Woman's Bible*, 2 vols. (New York: European Publishing Company, 1895) I:84.

⁸³See Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973) p.100.

⁸⁴See Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eugene Bianchi, *From Machismo to Mutuality: Woman—Man Liberation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976) pp.49-50.

⁸⁵See *ibid.*, pp.49-50.

exclude other-regard. The feminist reminds us that the voice of the woman must be included in articulating the goods which surround the concept of love. It is wrong for men to presume to speak for them and to refuse to learn from their discourse. Anna Howard Shaw, the Methodist minister turned suffragette at the end of the last century, saw this as a positive step towards embracing many goods alongside love including honesty, courage, and self-assertion.⁸⁶

Thus feminine Christian ethics is gravitating towards a concept of agape which deals much more with mutuality. This is typified in the work of Margaret Farley who defines agape as full mutuality marked by equality between the sexes.⁸⁷ Farley thinks that theologians, particularly of the Reformed tradition, have assumed that God is totally active and the Christian totally passive in their relationship, and following on from this that the Christian is totally active and the neighbour totally passive in the love relationship. This imbalance must be addressed by insisting that both parties in a love relationship are active, and that theologians must understand that 'receiving and giving are but two sides of one reality which is other-centered love.'⁸⁸

Agape and Rule Following

Taylor's own view of the situation can be understood alongside the feminist concept of agape in contrast to traditional Protestant theories of agape in so far as he sees the need to embrace a wide-variety of goods from a large number of backgrounds in our culture. I would argue, however, that his main bone of contention with most traditional theories of agape would challenge the method of their entire moral theory. From Taylor's vantage point, as one who sees an important role for the good in ethics, certain concepts of agape in modern theories have the problem of

⁸⁶See Anna Howard Shaw, *The Speeches of Anna Howard Shaw*, 2 vols., ed. Wilmer A. Linkugel (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1960) II:63-64.

⁸⁷See Margaret Farley, 'New pattern of relationship: beginnings of a moral revolution,' in *Woman: New Dimensions*, ed. Walter Burkhardt (New York: Paulist Press, 1975).

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, p.63.

being too one-dimensional—they have become too procedurally orientated, even in Christian circles.

Taylor's basic understanding of what *agape* entails, as well as its etymological source, agrees with most traditional accounts. He sees *agape* as a word which had a minor role in ordinary Greek language, but was then given new meaning 'where ... the ultimate understanding of what is involved in it is the love of God for us, which can be somehow taken up by us, and therefore we can participate in ...'.⁸⁹ Unlike the feminist emphasis on self-reference and the importance of self-affirmation in *agape*, however, Taylor pictures *agape* as that which transcends the self, which somehow breaks us out of ourselves. He pictures it as 'a kind of love that goes beyond any of these other human sources of love we understand, which in a sense always involve a degree of self-reference and self-fulfilment ...'.⁹⁰

With this picture in mind, Taylor can hardly find a place for *agape* being equated with any standardised set of regulations. Although most Christian ethicists would not equate *agape* with a specific moral code, there are those who would argue that *agape* leads to following certain ways of living. Paul Ramsey in *Deeds and Rules* sees two kind of general legislation: 'the meaning of essential humanity' and the set of conditions for the best possible social existence.⁹¹ Strictly speaking the first of these is not a rule at all. It is an ontological statement about the nature of humanity given both religious and rational understandings of the human condition.

The second, however, can be seen as a spin-off from Rawl's 'rules of practice' such as promise-keeping and truth-telling. In this Ramsey seems to stray from the path of the good: 'If there are any Christian moral or social practices, there cannot be exceptions that depart from them by direct general appeals to *agape* overriding the rules in particular cases in which the agent does not take the weighty responsibility of criticising the practice as a whole and attempting to replace it with another. *Agape* justifies no exception to the practice.'⁹²

⁸⁹See Appendix E.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹See Paul Ramsey, *Deeds and Rules in Christian Ethics* (New York: Scribner's, 1967).

⁹²Ibid., p.137.

This argument, however, contradicts what Taylor and others have recognised about moral reasoning, namely that it is a transitional action. We cannot agree with Ramsey that certain Christian beliefs or practices have captured the *truth* in terms of getting it absolutely right, for there may be ways of being Christian that we cannot even imagine. Take, for example, St. Francis and his idea of starting, within the tradition of monastic orders, a new ministry devoted to agape in the lay-community, rather than a vow of obedience in contemplation. Here was a traditional mendicant friar, but one who had regard for the community of the poor and the sick over and above the normal way of regarding one's Christianity as a devoted follower.⁹³

For Taylor, the captivating power of agape is that it can offer these radically new ways of being a Christian in serving God. It breaks down any preconceived stereotypes of what Christianity means, and thus offers us the uniqueness of God's love. This for him is what makes the saints so completely distinct. They are working under the power of agape rather than within the boundaries of our everyday conceptions of human experience. Breaking free of these parameters includes a radical transformation in this way. Agape is a 'kind of power that transcends and goes beyond the way we normally feel ourselves limited, and so I see the place of this in human life as being another one of those places (or in terms of the Christian faith I suppose *the* key place) where we see a possible vocation for human beings that transcends, that goes beyond, that even breaks out of in a sense, the self, the ordinary way of operating as human beings.'⁹⁴

Agape, given this feature of breaking through, and beyond to something higher for us, cannot possibly be limited to a set of moral rules for Taylor. More importantly, it cannot be restricted to right action, which is what most Christian theories of agape tend to emphasise. Just how deeply ingrained the procedural assumptions of our modern ethics are can be seen in William Frankena's polarity in *Ethics*: should we construe morality as primarily a following of certain principles or as primarily a cultivation of certain dispositions and traits?⁹⁵ Both of these are action-based moral theories. They assume that as long as one goes about ethics the right way

⁹³I owe this example to Charles Taylor.

⁹⁴See Appendix E.

⁹⁵See William Frankena, *Ethics*.

with the proper rules one will get the correct answer. They do not stop to take into consideration the teleological ramifications of morality. Even those such as Joseph Fletcher who embrace what Frankena has called *pure act-agapism*, are guilty of such an over-emphasis. Fletcher wants to argue that love is the standard which trumps all other moral obligations. This, however, is still too thin a description of agape. It does not suggest to us the power of the good, only the procedure of the right. Agape in this context is merely that way of acting which is better than other ways of acting.⁹⁶

Many modern theologians have been seduced by the all-pervasive appeal of utilitarianism and Kantian ethics. The distinction made between act-agapism and rule-agapism is a clear example of the theories of agape depending on utilitarian examples.⁹⁷ The primary focus in these theories of Christian ethics, like the primary focus in modern secular philosophy, is what it is right to do, which misses out of its conception of ethics a wide-range of issues involving the good, the significant, and the meaningful in our lives. Gene Outka reveals this hidden agenda in modern Christian ethics at the beginning of his work on agape by indicating that his is an investigation 'into love as a normative ethical principle or standard ...'.⁹⁸ What is presupposed in this is a framework of ethics as *actions*.

Even when Outka attempts to explore an 'agapeistic frame of mind'—shifting from rightness to goodness, doing to being, rule to virtue—he does not escape his initial preconceptions of procedural ethics.⁹⁹ He discusses agape in terms of feelings and attitudes, intentions and motives, and it soon becomes clear that what Outka in fact means by goodness and virtue is the internalising rather than the ontologising of the issue. The only shift that Outka has made is a Cartesian one which grounds the acts of agape in feelings and the will. The certainty about what love is must come from what is internal to our self. The state of agape itself, however, has not been altered. This is still assuming that agape is a 'normative ethical principle,' and not a life good, not something which is substantive. In doing so Outka demonstrates that

⁹⁶See for example, Joseph Fletcher, 'What's in a Rule?: A Situationist's View,' in *Norm and Context in Christian Ethics*, ed. Gene Outka and Paul Ramsey (New York: Scribner's, 1968).

⁹⁷See *ibid.*, p.332, for example: 'Let's say plainly that agape is utility; love is well-being; the Christian who does not individualise or sentimentalise love is a utilitarian.'

⁹⁸See Outka, *Agape*, p.3.

⁹⁹See *ibid.*, 123ff.

his theory of agape is one which is based on the Kantian ideal of universalising the particular maxim of agape. 'Finally, the doctrine that love is the form of the virtues need require no more than an insistence that love predominates ... in every decision made.'¹⁰⁰

The difficulty with this is it does not get behind the claim of this doctrine. What is needed in order to put this into practice is a reason why love *should* dominate, and this cannot merely be assumed.

De-theologising Agape

One way of approaching this dilemma in Christian ethics is to see how closely modern Christian theories of agape have been aligned with secular notions of beneficence or altruism. Philosophers have taken on board quite comfortably the theological notion of agape as altruistic action since it does not require any particular preconceptions of the divine or the transcendent. Furthermore, some theologians have even argued that agape as a theory of ethics can be justifiably read in the secular moral realm. To see agape as right action means that one will naturally be able to transfer it to a non-Christian universal beneficence or a kind of Millsian, utilitarian regard for others.

The criticism that Taylor has for the secular theorist who wants to take on board agape in some de-theologised form is one which is distinctly not relevant to the Christian ethicist who sees agape as primarily action orientated. For the secular philosopher can be reproved for not coming clean about certain goods which he is assuming in establishing the groundwork for an ethic of altruism. There are moral sources involved, Taylor argues, which he must admit to if he is to be at all consistent in his thinking.

For the Christian ethicist, however, another polemic must ensue. Clearly it is not a matter of the Christian working with assumptions he is not comfortable in admitting forthright. For presumably there would be no difficulty in pointing to God

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p.142.

as a moral source when one asks the Christian ethicist for a reason why we should act with love towards others. There is still the problem, however, which is common to the secular philosopher, that this source remains largely unarticulated in the agape theory.

It is true that the New Testament account is taken as understood, and our notions of acting in love are founded on the belief that because God is who he is we should love one another. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the emphasis in Christian ethics is on the right way of acting. While it assumes certain moral sources, it focuses not on this underlying ontology, but rather on correct procedure. Thus it is not surprising that Practical Theology has more in common with Sociology than Metaphysics.

If the Christian who is formulating a moral theory, when asked about these sources, will admit to this metaphysical dimension, the question can be raised, 'where then lies the problem?' In this instance it is not a matter of contradiction. The Christian is not saying one thing and really believing another. He knows that ultimately his ethics go back to God and thus ontological concepts of the good, so what is the difficulty?

Articulating Agape

The difficulty is assuming that such a moral source can be expected to play an important role in Christian ethics and yet remain tacitly in the background. Agape as a constitutive good exists in a space which needs articulating. For one thing this is precisely how we go about moral reasoning. Investigating the character of agape in community, between moral interlocutors, helps us understand not only the divine character of the good, but also the specific instances of agape in our everyday life. Secondly, in terms of the expressive nature of language, articulating agape is in some sense creating this good in our community. As far as expression is a constitutional part of what agape is eventually identified as for us, it is important to get clear in our 'webs of interlocution' exactly what is entailed in this good. In the same way that

belief in God is only a possibility for us because we can talk about him and talk to him through prayer, so agape understood as a moral source must exist for us in the conversations of a community. Thirdly, agape in ontological terms can be seen as a constitutive good. It is important to recognise agape as a moral source since it empowers us to do good through this articulation. Articulating agape brings us closer to the good of agape, and by doing so acts as a catalyst towards accomplishing the good in our lives.

This role for agape is crucial if we understand the concept as one which goes beyond the normative principles of an anthropocentric ethic. Agape for Taylor is in some respects a vocation,

‘that involves breaking beyond these normal [human] vocations ... on the one hand we have ethical codes and principles that in a certain way domesticate, that are meant to be applicable and liveable by ordinary people in ordinary circumstances. You can ask of them only so much. On the other hand it [agape] opens a way which seems to burst the bounds of any of these ethical codes.’¹⁰¹

So in one sense the Christian theory of agape which concentrates on action is missing an important part of its assumed foundation. It does not fully understand what it means to have a theocentric conception of agape, one where ‘you open the sky in one of these directions of self-transcendence ...’¹⁰² In another sense such a Christian ethic is not opening itself to the empowering love which it needs to drive these actions.

Taylor’s theological import sees moral action in terms of being empowered by the good. He challenges the strength and motivation behind modern hypergoods such as justice, freedom, and universal beneficence by asking about moral perception and motivation basic to our moral commitments. Here Taylor questions whether such moral commitments can be adhered to without some idea of God. The ‘seeing-good’ that he holds basic to our commitment to justice and benevolence is inseparable from agape, a love that endorses the claim in Genesis I that “God saw that it was good”. This is not, however, merely relying on some basic reason to see the other as good in

¹⁰¹See Appendix E.

¹⁰²Ibid.

terms of dignity or respect, etc. As mentioned above, Taylor sees this as far too dangerous and incapable of encouraging us to good works. The agape that Taylor wants to affirm, that he sees as necessary in any moral ontology, is one which is constitutive in its gaze: 'The original Christian notion of *agape* is a love that God has for humans which is connected with their goodness as creatures (though we don't have to decide whether they are loved because good or good because loved). Human beings participate through grace in this love. There is a divine affirmation of the creature, which is captured in the repeated phrase in Genesis I about each stage of the creation, "and God saw that it was good". *Agape* is inseparable from such a "seeing-good".'¹⁰³

What the Christian ethic can take from this is a lesson in the importance of agape as a moral source which gives us the power of seeing as good. Such a way of approaching altruism is essential if Taylor's polemic against Enlightenment naturalist standards of moral behaviour is to be accepted. Taylor points to the way Dostoyevsky has explored the idea that high moral standards need strong sources, particularly in a post-Enlightenment age. 'Dostoyevsky's *Devils*,' he argues, 'is one of the great documents of modern times, because it lays bare the way in which an ideology of universal love and freedom can mask a burning hatred, directed outward onto an unregenerate world and generating destruction and despotism.'¹⁰⁴

He goes on to ask 'whether we are not living beyond our moral means in continuing allegiance to our standards of justice and benevolence.'¹⁰⁵ The answer for the Christian can be 'no', but this must also be qualified, for we must come to realise the importance of articulating this strong moral source if we are to have any place for it in our lives. In one sense the Christian ethicist must be honest about another assumption that is made, and that is the loyalty to utilitarian/Kantian procedural ethics that is often assumed, one which aligns itself too easily with secular moral theory.

Great as the temptation is to see our ethics in terms of right actions, incomparably greater potential lies in a theistic programme which seeks to articulate

¹⁰³ *Sources of the Self*, p.516.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.517.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.517.

the strong moral sources underlying our moral intuitions. Many theologians recognise this fact. Oliver O'Donovan clearly understands the truth that Dostoyevsky has pronounced concerning an ethic of beneficence stripped of theological import:

‘Many times in the history of thought respect for fellow men, divorced from its theological context of love for the highest good, has collapsed into one of two corruptions: the attempt to tyrannise over the fellow-man by taking the responsibility for his welfare out of his hands, and the enslavement of the self to the fellow-man who becomes an object of desire and need. The first corruption, however benignly inspired, can lead only to the sort of totalitarian mastery of man by man such as is constantly threatened by modern projects of managerial philanthropy. The second, which is the characteristic relation of society to its heroes, provides the opportunity for tyranny by absolutising the erotic subordination of the weak and impressionable to the natural authority of the beautiful and the strong. Take away love for God, and the ontological parity which makes true neighbour-love possible is upset; one human being takes the place of God and confers value and significance upon the other. Anders Nygren’s famous opposition of Agape and Eros presumed to tell us, in effect, that no other form of love was possible: in love we must master or be mastered.’¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶See O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, p.229.

CHAPTER NINE



Conclusion: Articulating a Christian Ethic

It is not my intention to suggest that Christian ethics is completely given over to secular utilitarianism or neo-Kantian formulations. The important ontological dimension of Agape, as a constituting good, can clearly be recognised as a theme in many theologians. Nygren's concept of Agape, for example, finally relies not on a way of *doing*, but of *being*. It is dependent upon a relationship to the reality of God.

Taylor would agree with Barth in so far as the latter understands that it is only with the supernatural state of affairs that we are empowered to love. This is clearly invoked in recognising that '... a man whom God takes into fellowship with Himself ... is given a determination which is not only new, but so radically and totally new that the change can be described only as a new creation of new birth ... It is not that he *should* love but that he *may* and *will*.'¹

Moltmann's theology of hope which says that 'Love does not snatch us from the pain of time, but takes the pain of the temporal upon itself,' can be expressed in terms which sees this hope as constituted by God as a moral source.²

Concepts like 'the ideal of love', 'the law of love', and 'agape' are ontological concepts for Niebuhr. Love is maintaining a basic *reality*. It is something which we relate to in terms of the way things are, rather than doing what is right. It depends finally on the character of God.

¹See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2:777.

²See Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James Leitch (New York: Harper and Row, 1967) p.31.



Clearly a complete revision of Christian ethics is not called for here. Rather, what I would suggest in conclusion is a more positive way of incorporating the lessons from Taylor's moral theory. His arguments against various forms of naturalism can collectively be interpreted as a kind of apologetic. Subjectivism, mechanistic explanations, and projectionism have been dominating the moral arena for so long that any argument such as those incorporated in Christian ethics which contradicts and challenges the fundamental premises of these interpretations is *ipso facto* an argument in the minority and as such must bear the burden of proof. The theologian and Christian ethicist who has felt intellectually oppressed by these naturalist theories can look to Taylor's arguments against naturalism as a philosophically cogent way of addressing the inconsistencies secular modernity attempts to ignore.

In one sense the first part of *Sources of the Self* can be read as a natural theology. Taylor is arguing from what can be observed and reasoned within our human moral experiences to the conclusion of a moral ontology which includes the transcendent. He himself believes that this is the Christian God. A space for God in Taylor's moral theory essentially amounts to a space for Christian ethics in the moral arena. The domination of secularism is challenged on its own grounds and found to be insufficient for explaining how we live our lives and what makes sense to us as moral agents. Thus we can look to the Christian formulation of ethics to make better sense of the moral domain. As such Taylor's arguments creates a space of discourse for the Christian worldview.

More positively, the various reasons Taylor gives for articulating the good in moral interlocution are all relevant to the practice of Christian ethics. Moral discourse as creating the good can find both a theological and pastoral point of

application. Talking about God, for example, in community and talking to Him in prayer are ways of creating meaning about God in our lives and our situations.

Theologically this has a great deal to say about the importance the speech-act has for the *real*. Not only is articulation essential in placing God in our lives in a meaningful way, but this is also true with respect to the Scriptures, the Gospel, and our personal faith. Talking about our beliefs substantiates them for us, grounds them in our horizons of meaning. Articulation in this sense also emphasises the importance of community, since it is in the expressive creating of the self with and through others that this interlocution occurs.



Articulating also involves empowering. God as a moral source gives us the strength to do good. This can be seen as a form of Grace which is accessed in moral discourse. Articulating the constitutive good in this way amounts to loving the good. Subsequently, the love of this good empowers us to do good works. One way that the ramifications of this can be understood is in the dichotomy of the substantive and the procedural.

Christian ethics tends to be 'applied' in so far as it seeks to address specific issues relevant to the social and political domain. It addresses ethical problems primarily in terms of policy. The positive aspect of this is that Christianity can be directly relevant to the kinds of issues that individuals and communities are grappling with in our modern situation. The negative aspect, however, is that Christian ethics can easily slide into a strict procedural formulation which neglects the good in our lives. There is even the danger of Christian ethics equating itself with an obligationist stance. Such a proceduralist emphasis, however, will ultimately either fail to convince us of the good of right action, or must evolve into a substantive claim. If Christian ethics concentrates too heavily on right actions it will ignore the important moral sources of its policy formulations, but, as Taylor has shown, such sources need

to be articulated in order for us to be empowered to live up to our own high moral standards.

Taylor's moral ontology can remind the theologian and Christian ethicist that essential to any moral policy is getting clear about the goods assumed in such a policy. Clarifying assumptions is one of the important functions of articulation. In moral reasoning much of what is involved entails relieving the tension between certain goods, such as individualism and accountability.

The argument that Taylor employs sets out from the beginning to bring together the ethical and the 'good life'. Questions of ethics in Christianity need to address not only public policy and right action, but questions about what it is good to *be* and the nature of the Christian life. Not only are these questions legitimate in and of themselves, but they are questions about qualitative distinctions which underlie many of our formal policies and doctrines. So that by articulating these assumptions there is the possibility of reconciliation between goods in a Christian environment which confesses a commitment to embracing the good. A compelling example for Taylor of this kind of reconciliation is Augustine's formulation of inwardness. The paradox of inwardness and transcendence is truly reconciled in the understanding that the move *within* entails for the moral agent a move *beyond* to God the sustainer of our being.



Certainly one of the most important lessons to learn from Taylor is the need to undergird our Christian ethics with an articulated theology. Getting clear about the nature of things is tantamount to understanding the way things have meaning for us in our lives and what makes certain ideas compelling. In theology, as in Christian ethics questions, about meaning are fundamentally linked to ideas of epistemology and metaphysics.

Understanding Taylor's moral ontology as anchored in a specific formulation of knowledge means that he has a tremendous amount of insight to bring to the way the Christian ethicist approaches moral reasoning. Essentially his argument for *ad hominem* reasoning, like his challenge to naturalism, can be interpreted as an apologetic for the Christian position.

The Christian understanding of the human agent as created by God and sustained in love by this creator brings to the ethical discourse certain assumed value judgements about the moral agent. The ontological make-up of the individual includes these premises which are pregnant with evaluative meaning. While this goes against every foundationalist creed which insists on segregating the 'is' from the 'ought' in ethics, Taylor's epistemological challenge to this form of apodictic moral reasoning exposes it as an illusion. Thus the Christian understanding of ethics is vindicated in terms of moral reasoning as a non-foundational transitional process which dissolves the boundary between fact and value.

In Systematics there is a parallel application in the realm of hermeneutics. For with Taylor's understanding of moral reasoning and his 'Best Account' principle, we can give an important role in Christian ethics to the hermeneutical task of making the best sense of our epistemological positions. Such a hermeneutic must be balanced, however, by acknowledging that intrinsic to the transitional nature of moral reasoning is the conditionality of any position which one arrives at. There can never be any claim to possessing an absolutely right answer.

Clearly faith has an important role to play in Taylor's moral process. Reason and epistemology can be taken only to a certain point beyond which a belief 'in what is hoped for' must be relied on. Furthermore, faith for Taylor is essential if we are to understand a theocentric ethic as something that may transcend our own ethical beliefs, and break the boundaries of our anthropocentric moral realm. The good may be something that we cannot even imagine at this point. In this respect Taylor is advocating a kind of negative theology which states that God is such that we can never fully understand His processes. Truth in such circumstances is always approached as a lived experience.

What naturally follows from this is that knowing God through faith is tantamount to articulating Him in moral reasoning (*ad hominem*). Thus the emphasis again comes back to the role of articulation in our lives. Furthermore, this relates to the importance of pluralism in the Church and in the world. With our faith in God as articulated in a Christian ethic and in Systematic Theology we understand Him as valuable, but we understand the other interlocutors as valuable as well. *Agape* in community means seeing the other as good, and as such there is a wager involved on the value of their belief and moral framework. We can understand this as the engine which drives our willingness to engage in moral reasoning with the significant others in our lives, articulating in webs of interlocution the meaning and value of a Christian experience.

Coming to the fore in such dialogues will be various ways of experiencing God as well as various formulations of the good for Christian ethics. While this can be applied to the way Christian ethics can gain from other theological disciplines such as Systematics, Biblical Studies, or Ecclesiology, it can also strive to converse with individual voices of quite contrary beliefs in the philosophical and sociological spheres. Most immediately, it can be applied to issues in Christian ethics which need strong moral sources. As such Taylor helps us to recognise that an important part of our Christian moral existence lies in articulating the good and what this means for the Christian life in community.



Clearly Taylor's philosophical system has much to bring to Christian ethics. Particularly relevant is the significance of articulating the tacit goods of our communities as a theological endeavour. There are other avenues within moral theology, however, where a critique of Taylor's philosophy will bear important fruit

in the future. Taylor himself has recognised a legitimate demand to develop his argument as it was left at the end of *Sources of the Self* and plunge into the deeper issues of theology. Such a work would no doubt be a rich enunciation, one which may help to clarify some of Taylor's own theological positions and mitigate some as yet implicit difficulties in his own Christian belief.

One such issue is his ambivalence towards any natural law theory. On the one hand Taylor gains much from Aristotle and obviously sympathises with Aquinas concerning the nature of the moral agent. There is an explicit teleological dimension undergirding his entire ontological project which seems very sympathetic towards some 'objective' understanding of a natural law theory directing the human good—one issuing forth from God the creator.

On the other hand, however, Taylor is very wary of affirming an absolute order for several reasons. Unlike Plato and Aristotle, he does not believe that given enough 'wisdom' we will be able to determine *exactly* what the purpose of the human agent should be. This for Taylor is too restricting in the sense that it does not allow for those ways of being human which may transcend our normal understanding of the anthropological realm. For example, it does not take into consideration the fact that God may be calling someone to love in a way that radically move beyond the normal boundaries of experience:

'... on the one hand there are these images of order ... showing up different in history is what the ordered life is, and lots of them ought to be taken very seriously up to a point. A lot of wisdom and insight of human life is attached to them. But the right call of humanity itself, the ultimate vocation of human beings, passes beyond what we can find in all of those because the shift from the anthropocentric to the theocentric is such a tremendous shift.'³

There is another reason that human limits may work against any natural law theory for Taylor. Not only would such a theory be too confining, but given our own limited rationale, wisdom, and understanding, Taylor may argue that such a moral order—if it exists—could never fully be known:

'... the idea that we can give it all in a formula now through man's eyes which can be coherently laid out, mapped with a vertical and a

³See Appendix C.

horizontal, seems to me to be wrong. There is a principle of great disturbance always entering into human life, our best constructed analysis always has this principle of disturbance, and therefore there is an act of faith involved. So I neither want to just sweep all these notions of order aside—I think you can't even get clear about where you are if we try and do that, all philosophy that tries to do that is a failure—but nor do I think we can take one as being what the total answer to human nature is about.⁴

There is a tension in Taylor's theory underlying his philosophical anthropology. My suspicion is that this is partly due to a haziness or uncertainty Taylor has concerning the limits of sin and how that affects the moral agent's knowledge and understanding of the good. Articulating more clearly how it is that the human agent can come to understand God in a condition that Taylor apparently sees as unfulfilled and debilitating may help to shed light on his own attitude to God's nature and our relationship towards Him.

While it is misleading to talk of *the* theory of natural law since there are various forms, the principle in common has traditionally been expressed as morals and legislation being, *in some sense or other*, objective, accessible to reason and based on human nature. To the extent that we understand natural law as objective, however, it runs up against Taylor's own understanding of human experience. On the other hand it must be said that Taylor seems to be working with some variation of natural law in constructing a moral theory based upon certain fundamental, ontological assumptions of human personhood. He also hints at a natural law when he says that there are 'images of order' which show up in history and which are extremely compelling for him.⁵ Furthermore, he claims that there are strong intuitions 'of what it is to be a human being, of human life: friendship is better than enmity, the unexamined life isn't worth living, etc.,' which lend weight to a theory of natural law.⁶

There are certainly traces of a Thomistic/Aristotelian understanding of the moral agent in this view, viz., an important place for teleology in our character so that we recognise that humans are fulfilled by living up to a certain potential. The

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

descriptive and prescriptive law is merged by emphasising the ontological nature of the moral agent. If I describe a human as rational, for example, prescriptively this dictates what will fulfil the human being. But Taylor needs to articulate further how it is that this can be true and yet at the same time allow a plurality of ways to be a good human being.

It would be helpful if he could articulate his idea of natural law further, even if, as I suspect, it is a shifting paradigm similar to the view of John Courtney Murray. Murray sees natural law as not necessarily based on an ultimate metaphysical principle, but as grounded within the history of the human race and therefore as ever-changing.⁷ Indeed much of the recent literature on natural law theory has tended to redress the impartial emphasis on an 'absolute', disengaged reasoning by reinforcing the totality of the human's *being* as the focus of our understanding. As Richard McCormick has expressed in a review of recent natural law literature, 'Traditional theology, at least in its popularisations, has too often left the impression that when one deals with the natural law he is simply unpacking basic principles which, when shined up a bit, will reflect a rather comprehensive kaleidoscope of norms.'⁸ It is clear that within philosophy and theology in the move away from any objective, 'rational' standpoint in empirical formulations, such thinkers as Taylor will begin to play an important role in our understanding of natural law theory and how we come to understand its role in the moral domain.

Coming alongside the question of natural law there are issues in the area of hermeneutics which are also important for Taylor. For if there is always going to be some kind of 'disturbance' in the human sphere when it comes to seeking understanding, how are we to approach textual interpretation? What prevents us from sliding into an extreme relativism?

Such questions are not so much difficulties and confusions within Taylor's own philosophical system as areas of application for his epistemology. Hermeneutics, like moral development, rests on a bedrock of epistemological transitions. We

⁷See John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1960).

⁸See Richard A. McCormick, 'The Natural Law: Recent Literature', in *Readings in Moral Theology, No. 7: Natural Law and Theology*, Charles E. Curran and Richard A McCormick, eds. (New York: Paulist Press, 1991) pp.181-182.

understand the development of hermeneutical positions as attempting to come to grips with the difficulties of meaning in culturally specific texts with culturally specific interpreters. Even the variety of methods from Bultmann's demythologising to Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons' and the 'New Hermeneutics' can be regarded as an analogue to the way Taylor understands moral positions.

At certain points hypergoods may prescind other goods by virtue of their epistemological gain. Rather than seeing this as grist for the relativist mill, we can argue that the transition explains a way of getting closer to the truth—things work better from the new position, there are less inconsistencies, more details are explained, etc. So it is with hermeneutics. Taylor's moral reasoning applied to textual interpretation means that one is concerned with getting the best account of the text including the author's intent, the compelling nature of the message, and the cultural restrictions of the truth claims.

This is by no means to be considered an 'absolute' reading of the text, but it may be a better interpretation than previously offered. While it can be argued that such an absence of any finality in hermeneutics naturally lends itself to the idea of extreme, subjectivist plurality whereby any interpretation no matter how bizarre is as good as the next, Taylor's epistemology quickly diffuses this situation by giving clear and concise arguments for a more critical approach. One interpretation would be considered a better one because it comes closer to the truth of the text. It deals with more of the facts, it gives us a clearer explanation of the text or it alleviates some inconsistency in the other hermeneutical stance. What could be taken even further is the application of the idea of moral reasoning (as interpretation) in the realm of hermeneutics. Both the work of Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre have much to bring to this discussion in terms of how we as human agents come to understand and hold particular critical positions whether they be moral or otherwise.

Indeed, the comparisons between Taylor and MacIntyre have often been noted. Both philosophers are Catholic thinkers heavily influenced by Aristotle. They are also both critical of the modern notion of individuality, and wish rather to emphasise the importance of defining the self in community. There are, however, some profound differences between the two thinkers, such as their reading of

Aquinas. Taylor, in contrast to MacIntyre, draws a sharp distinction between the Augustinian and Thomist traditions on God and the self. In this one could argue that Taylor and MacIntyre start from two opposite ends of the spectrum when approaching the issues of the good in the human domain. In an investigation into the theological significance of Taylor, James Buckley has noted this important difference:

‘ ... even when Taylor finds Thomas helpful (as in the axiom that “grace perfects nature”), he finds him more akin to Erasmian Catholicism than hyper-Augustinian Lutheranism (p. 246 of *Source of the Self*). There are also more substantive contrasts with MacIntyre. For example, on pp.51-52 [of *Sources of the Self*] Taylor says: “One could [and, I would say, MacIntyre does] put it this way: because we cannot but orient ourselves to the good, and thus determine our place relative to it and hence determine the direction of our lives, we must inescapably understand our live in narrative form, as a ‘quest’. But one could [and, I would say, Taylor by and large does] start from another point: because we have to determine our place in relation to the good, therefore we cannot be without an orientation to it, and hence must see our lives in a story” (51-52).⁹

Buckley goes on to say that ‘Understanding (if not settling) such differences between these two Catholic philosophers will be essential to Catholic theology over the next decade.’¹⁰ There are certainly other distinctions to ‘understand’ which will further the discipline of Christian ethics. Two particular issues which have arisen in exchange between the philosophers are the problem of conflicting goods and the tension between individualism and community. In effect these two issues can be addressed concurrently insofar as MacIntyre understands the irresolvable conflicts of goods and goals as a dilemma which subverts ‘the Thomistic Aristotelianism which he envisages as the only way out of the liberal-individualist ethics of modernity.’¹¹

MacIntyre’s most probing critique of Taylor’s work is that Taylor allows for a conflict of goods in his moral system and does not give an account of how one goes about reconciling various goods which seem to meet at an impasse. With a plurality

⁹See James J. Buckley, ‘A Return to the Subject: The Theological Significance of Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self*’, *The Thomist*, 55, 1991, pp.497-509; p.501, fn.5.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹See Fergus Kerr, ‘Moral Theology after MacIntyre: Modern Ethics, Tragedy and Thomism’, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 8:1, 1995, pp.33-44; p.36.

of goods, MacIntyre fears that Taylor is sliding into a form of soft relativism—that we choose between goods as a matter of mere personal preference.¹² The ramifications of this view are evident: if one's moral position is merely a matter of emotivism, then the primacy in the human domain is given to the individual deliberator. Communities are no longer valued as foci of moral identity. Taylor denies any such position, insisting rather that one does not need to hold to such an extreme anti-realism in order to claim a plurality of goods. Nor does he claim that a plurality of goods necessarily leads to extreme individualism.

He has, however, admitted that this is a difficulty which needs to be taken seriously. MacIntyre's polemic brings up the important question of truth in Christian ethics and the tension between wanting to affirm an ecumenical stance towards the various goods in modernity and not wanting to cave in to demands for absolute relativism. Just how Taylor can come to reconcile these two positions and how MacIntyre and Taylor both engage with the difficult issue of plurality and the modern identity will come to play an important role for the future of moral theology.

Finally, there is a great deal of anticipation for Taylor to dialogue more directly with theology. While his work in philosophical anthropology and his engagements with MacIntyre can bear rich fruit in the discipline, explicit theological formulations will be mutually beneficial. Not only will Taylor directly contribute to theology, but I suspect he will come to find more sympathetic views than he initially would have imagined. The similarities between those theologians that he has read at an early age like Congar and de Lubac and his own ideas about multiculturalism in the global order are substantial. There are, however, equally profound parallels between his mature philosophical system and other theologians that Taylor would find compelling.

One quite straightforward example is the transcendental Thomism of Karl Rahner. As a Catholic student of Kant, Rahner has developed a system of theology which pays particular attention to the subjective viewpoint of the knower in the world. His appreciation of Maréchal and Heidegger has created an atmosphere in

¹²See Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Critical Remarks on *Sources of the Self* by Charles Taylor', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54:1, 1994, pp.187-190. See also MacIntyre's comments on Taylor's contribution to *After MacIntyre*.

modern Catholic theology which is conducive to a phenomenological approach to *being* in the world and as such it is a view that Taylor would find extremely valuable.

The main point of dialogue for Taylor would be understanding our epistemological questions in the human domain. Rahner, like Taylor, does not see the world in terms of objects making lifeless impressions on the *tabula rasa* of the mind. There is rather a contact theory of knowledge involved much akin to the kind Taylor holds to. Rahner's *Spirit in the World*, which brings Maréchal's interpretation of Aquinas into a critical dialogue with Kant and Heidegger, argues that the knower must be in real contact with the *absolute* of being in order to have true knowledge of oneself.¹³

Essentially Rahner's move beyond the agnosticism of Kant and Heidegger on the question of God is a re-formulation of Augustine's epistemological stance which, as we have seen, has many compelling parallels with Taylor's contact theory of knowledge. With Rahner as with Augustine, the intimacy of the union with God undergirds our knowledge of the world and of our self. His interiorising of knowledge is similar to the radically reflexive stance that Taylor attributes to Augustine.

Clearly there is a rich source of dialogue in this tradition for Taylor. As a philosopher who himself recognises a debt owed to Heidegger and the 'Continental' tradition, his voice would be an important annotative source for modern Catholic thought influenced by Rahner, Maréchal, and Rousselot. Further theological investigations not only with the transcendental Thomists, but with a whole swatch of theological positions will also help give a voice to Taylor's own implicit identity as a significant Christian thinker. This in turn will give him the theological space to confront some of the questions addressed in this thesis concerning his understanding of natural law, conflicting goods, the shifting hermeneutical standpoint, and the individual in community. Furthermore, we can anticipate that such a contribution by Taylor will greatly enrich our understanding of God in the world—His revelation and grace and how we come into contact with this reality in the human domain.

¹³See Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. William Dych (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968).

APPENDIX A

Transcript of Interview

No. 1: 26/09/95

- MH: As far as Christianity and Philosophy of Religion goes I see a lot of bedevilling by the Cartesian slant, and I was wondering if you saw the same things. I'm thinking particularly of the way Philosophers of Religion spend their time on arguments for the existence of God.
- CT: I haven't read a lot of that, but from a distance I get some of that impression.
- MH: It seems that there is a case for transferring what you've talked about as far as Philosophy of Mind is concerned onto things like that. You even mentioned Aquinas when we were talking on e-mail. He tries to prove the existence through the five-ways.
- CT: Yeah, sure.
- MH: As far as epistemology goes, when you're talking about Cartesian versus Contact Theory, I was wondering if you could give some sort of explanation of how that would work in a metaphysical belief such as the existence of God.
- CT: Well, one of the ways of looking at it is that Contact Theory isn't answering the same questions. So if you want to know how to take somebody from a standing start, in this case someone with no concept of God, to what you want to prove—the existence of God, or a relation to God, then the answer might be, 'it can't be done'. There's no argument against the belief that it can't be done. Because why? Well because the thing about a Contact Theory is when you're there you know it, but when you're not there you don't necessarily know it. So take the example I'm using of waking up. The thing is that when you've woken up you know that you've been dreaming, but formerly you

didn't, and it's not necessarily the case that you could play back what you know now to the situation then. So the issue is, do you trust this kind of knowledge? The whole point of Contact Theory, or another way of looking at it, is that in Contact Theory you trust that whole diachronic sense which brings you here now. So the way in which this plays out in relation to God is not in a view of how you can take someone from a standing start, but in a view of what it is to know God as God. This may be understood in a totally non-foundationalist way where it is not finding the criteria and breaking it down, but on the contrary there is a way of reading where you come from and what you become in such a way that you see this grasping your whole surrounding as getting a firmer grip on reality than what you had before. And you get in the *Confessions* of Augustine the story of error-overcoming and that story has built into it the understanding that these transitions were what I call 'error-reducing' transitions. The style of argument is something I try to talk about in 'Explanation and Practical Reason'—I don't know if you've seen that.

MH: Yes.

CT: There's a lot more to be said on that, and it should be done again and again until I get it right, but that's the basic idea, that it's a way of understanding how you argue for where you are, where you can appreciate where you are. The other view would be that in order to trust that sense of 'we've overcome this error and got there', you would have to break down that sense into the foundationalist argument in which there were certain indices for its being reality, which in turn you could argue were trustworthy, which would then be isolated as the ones that were here and not there. And you could argue with the person that in virtue of these indexes this is trustworthy, and I have this defence. But you have to have a foundationalist argument which takes the subject that is being argued with and takes it out of time, out of the diachronic sense, into no time or any time or instant. Knowledge should be reconstructable in the instant, atemporality is one of the requirements of the

Cartesian theory. You don't trust the diachronic self-understanding which itself assumes some kind of contact—we are in touch with reality and that's why when we break down an error we feel ourselves confirmed in reality. We don't trust that we want another kind of argument, and it has to be reconstructed in the instant.

MH: I think I'm getting the picture, but is there room for faith in this?

CT: Of course, it is central to this because there is this idea of ... at a certain point there is a very strong sense of, 'yeah that's got to be it', and prior to that point, as you're moving through all these transitions, you have hunches that you very strongly have to go with.

MH: I see a way of interpreting Aquinas' Five-ways in that sense. In the way that he leaps from what we see in the world to 'this is what we all call God'. Would that be a misrepresentation?

CT: No, I think that there are lots of ways of interpreting it which would make sense of it just as an articulation of the reality sense that people had in those days. But an anachronistic way of taking that today is that you can take anybody from anywhere, from wherever they are starting, and lead them by undeniable, unarguable, systematic steps to God. It plainly doesn't do that.

MH: On the other hand, I can see that someone could argue that in the case of mankind, as Plato thought, everyone has this commonality of wanting the good, so that in that way we could take anyone from anywhere on the basis of human nature and argue from that standpoint.

CT: Yeah, but then argued from that, again not looking at it from Plato's way of looking at it but the way I'm trying to look at it now, what does that mean? Well, that means having acquired a considerably reliable reality sense, if you want to articulate it in this sense ... yeah you might come out with something like the Five Ways or you might come up with something like the Augustinian type. The Five Ways of Aquinas all pass through the cosmos,

whereas as you know, the argument of Augustine passes through the sense of perfection. I mean, the experience of perfection is not coming from me and therefore something higher exists. That in a way is clearer to me as an articulation of this very strong sense of God, and you articulate that and show why it is so blazingly evident having got there. Why it is so blazingly evident that there is a God. But once more it doesn't speak across the gulf to people who are not there, and it's not an argument useful in that way, but it is an argument useful in articulating having got there. I think that Aquinas' Five-Ways is another articulation of having gone somewhere in the sense of the cosmos. But it just doesn't say anything across the gap of a completely different cultural experience. That's been problematised—many people just don't sense the cosmos in that way at all. Even those who do feel problematised: so the whole way in which these proofs can function ceases to be possible.

MH: Do you then think that there is any room in this sort of Contact Theory for proofs for the existence of God?

CT: I guess I just talked myself into such a role. This has been very helpful, thank you. I mean that, yeah, there could be especially articulations of where one has got and they could be very valuable for others who are searching their way along. To other people searching their way along and maybe moving in that direction, yeah, that may be something worth exploring.

MH: Yes, I see what you mean.

CT: But, and maybe that's how we have to understand it at the time, the thing is I suppose we have to say that there isn't a non-anachronistic answer to the question of our understanding of God. Because at the time the kind of distinction we can make today between articulating that reality sense and speaking to anyone anywhere, and leading them by strict argument—that kind of distinction, that kind of either/or—wasn't an option until after Aquinas. There is no trouble in seeing that today.

MH: Let me move into something that you've touched on and that is the disparate nature of the way Aquinas saw the world and the way we as post-Galilean modernists are seeing the world. In your theory you are obviously arguing that we can't see human nature in terms of mechanisms in social theory, etc.. At the same time we surely can't go back to the cosmology of Aristotle. But I'm wondering in resurrecting something resembling what Aristotle sees as the human good and ideas like that, do we also resurrect some of the *muthos* of the cosmology? This is a big question in the theologian's mind because at the one moment they are ready to jump with you into this moral pool and fight social theorists, and at the same moment they want to affirm ideas like the doctrine of creation that would tend to emphasise that.

CT: Emphasise what, what does that mean, the whole cosmology of it all?

MH: The idea of the human good being God and there being a design ... the whole notion of teleology. I'm wondering is there any room for that, given the way modern science has stripped everything?

CT: Yeah, I think, there are two pieces of the answer I want to give at the same time. One piece of the answer is 'yes', of course the whole doctrine of creation—creation by God, a good God, a loving God—involves some idea of that kind. It's very being made is a gift and a gift to things that are made and particular to us as made. But no, the bursting out of, the breaking the bounds of the very notions of the cosmos, in particular, the even more degenerate versions of that which arose in the transition—the 'degenerate versions' is perhaps too strong—but the Leibnitzian Providence attacked by Voltaire, this has been a very positive thing. We can't understand in just human terms the kinds of things we grapple at as human beings. In these terms providence can't be understood, and will always subvert if you think that it's there to produce a harmonious happy world in that sense; and we are struggling very much to understand that providence, and the condition to understanding it is such a transition from being absolutely anthropocentric to being 'theocentric',

to use this expression. We have trouble until this is totally achieved. So there's where there's a big leap of faith, a big element of faith. So in one very important sense that view of the cosmos which preceded the 18th century views, even that has to be completely blown apart. But that's not just by Galilean science. The Holocaust, everything that you want to think about in the modern experience, in modern history, has blown that apart, and to the extent that people are still hanging onto those older views, to that extent there is a tremendous inclination to unbelief, to despair, to turning off the whole thing, which is one of the very powerful engines of unbelief.

APPENDIX B

Transcript of Interview

No. 2: 03/10/95

- MH: I've just been reading this interesting dialogue between you and Quentin Skinner. What I wanted to ask first of all was how you personally react to all these theologians and non-theologians 'theologising' your philosophy, particularly in *Sources of the Self*. Would you consider it legitimate or is that way out on a limb?
- CT: Well, I mean I think to someone like Quentin—and there are a number of people like that—they just don't understand what depends on what, and what is meant to depend on what in the argument. And of course they could be right and I could be wrong ... but I don't see how they could be right on that. In other words, there is an argument there where I am trying to use the resources that I would imagine are available in principle to anyone regardless of their ultimate metaphysical and theological view. In the first part of *Sources* what I'm actually trying to say is the way we actually reason is this that and the other, and so some of these theories like the projectionist theories just can't be sustained ... and I'm justified in asking for the agreement of people whatever their views. And the suspicion somehow is that in order to hold the position I'm holding I have to already have had a theological premise. It is derived from that, and [they feel] that somehow I'm playing my cards very close to my chest and not revealing this theological premise which it actually depends on, and they want to blow the whistle and show that's the case. I mean it's one of these cases where it is true I hold a theological view, it's also true I'm holding this view at the end of the book. It's not true that the order of argument is the one that they impute. And I think it is a very important philosophical enterprise: speaking to everybody regardless, across the gap of these basic differences on matters that you think can be argued

where we can reach agreement across these differences. And so I set the argument up that way, and I still think the argument is valid.

MH: Quentin Skinner is on this side, but on the other side you've got various theologians who sort of say 'yippee' when you show these theological tendencies. What about this side? They in a way are taking the same kind of step.

CT: Well, there is a complex relationship of another kind where we could see some people saying 'yippee' about it. That is, it is certainly true that a completely projectionist, naturalist position leaves no room for the issues for which theological doctrines depend, so it is perfectly clear that what I'm saying there opens the road or moves an obstacle. So to the extent that an incredible amount of modern thinking has been caught by this epistemological mind cramp, so that we get this effect of people tearing down their own ontology in order to fit with the pre-shrunk epistemological view of what you could genuinely talk about ... and projectivism is an epistemologically driven theory of morality; it is nothing we could be talking about that we could have grounds to know of virtues out there (the crude way John Mackie puts it) and therefore they must be projected. So a lot of my work, including the beginning of *Sources*, has been to try and show that this epistemological emperor has no clothes. Now you might say that if this argument works it opens the way for all sorts of people. It opens the way for Nietzsche, and post-moderns, and tons of people run through this gap including different groups in theology. So you could imagine that people who felt somewhat intellectually oppressed by this climate would feel 'yeah terrific' if somebody scores a point, and that's perfectly legitimate. Indeed the error again in these people like Quentin is that they think that their epistemological elements are so solid that the only reason anyone would be foolish enough to disagree with them would be if they had an antecedent prejudice of one of these kinds, and since my prejudice is theological, that's what commands my whole project. My argument is that ... I mean it may be

one of my motives to make this in the first place, but that's not the same as basing the argument on this. I don't need this to make the point.

MH: While I'm on this topic, I think it's fascinating that you have people like Skinner on the one hand and you have various theologians reading the same work and criticising you for something completely opposite. One is criticising you for being too explicitly Christian in your agenda, and the theologians are criticising you for not fleshing out the undertones of Christianity in *Sources*, and so it's almost like you're sitting on a fence between these two camps. Have you felt that?

CT: No, I mean if it's that other criticism that you mentioned [reading theology into my agenda], it's the same error. Certainly there is a legitimate demand that I go on and write another book or somebody write another book which develops this whole Christian dimension, that's true. But in the logic and argument of that book it's the same mistake on both sides. That is, to think that it would somehow be a clearer argument on my part if I'd started from a theological premise. The argument of the book is that we can ... starting from what we all have to accept whatever our theological position, these connections between the good and modernity, and the evolution of the self ... you can see certain of these powerful themes, aligned to the understanding of the self which also at the same time is aligned to the good because the two are connected, developing over history, and it has an important Christian input. I think all these things are ideally what everybody regardless of their position could accept. And this is not entirely indefensible, there are people that are miles away from me in their theological and metaphysical outlook who have big problems with the book. Quentin has big problems with a lot of the thrust of the argument too, and so that has probably partly influenced him thinking I've got it wrong, but there are lots of people who have no theological interests at all who have been sympathetic. So it seems to me to be a mistake, or it may be that some people don't think that there is a place you can stand—you have to start either with a theological

premise, and that shoots into the whole thing, or a non-theological premise. And that is perfectly one possibility of setting up their whole thought, but there is another possible process where we can reason with each other without referring to that, and take other people to the point where then these issues can be posed, and posed I think more fruitfully than they are when we're stuck in one of these cracks where we can't see.

MH: I can see dialogues across the gap being very important here. I know this is not what you mean when you are talking about not coming from a certain viewpoint, but we still can reason with each other. Surely part of your whole outlook is that we do come from a viewpoint, there is no such thing as a disengaged person, a self-positing being with no assumptions. But the assumptions that you want to make, are they more fundamentally empirical?

CT: No, empirical is not the issue. It is much more like what I call 'Transcendental Arguments'. That is, what I try and do in the first part of *Sources* is drawing on people's sense of what it is they are doing when they are reasoning, try to draw out from that that certain pictures of the whole moral outlook just are not credible ... and this is taking out inescapable human factors, dimension of consciousness, and you try to show that implicit in the matters of understanding of things which they are on another level negating, and so this other level is in serious doubt. The challenge is why hold to that which doesn't fit with the only experience that could justify it? What you're doing is not empirical in the sense that the deliverances that are rock bottom here are observations. It's really arguments to the effect that it couldn't be anything else but this. For instance, a very important part of the argument in *Sources* is that when we deliberate we don't treat the goods that we are making referential reference points in deliberation as projections. That's the combination in which they just couldn't be projections, because if they are projections then they can't be reference points anymore, and then the question is 'do I want to go on projecting them?' So you just can't treat them as projections, and it's an appeal to this experience. It's analogous to

Chomskian appeals to grammaticality. Grammaticality, intuition is the same ... the speakers of the language have to agree. It's not just an observation, it's a normative—you have to say this—you have to say 'I'm not now' and not 'I be not' or 'I not'. It's like those kinds of intuitions that people have as speakers of the language, or, in this case, people have as deliberators. And then the argument goes on, what grounds can you have for holding a projectionist view that will overwhelm the area of human experience in which these things, namely values and goods etc., figure? In that area of experience you can't understand them in that way, and yet you want to wheel in this metaphysical view completely unconnected with that, indeed running against the logic of that. Why do you think this metaphysical view can trump that? The answer really is because they bought some epistemologically influenced story. That's really what it is, so what I'm trying to say is, 'OK, let's look at those stories, where do they pan out?' Do they pan out in the best understanding of human life motivation? No, they don't do that either because, well it's a long story, but they certainly don't make any sense in the actual way in which these things figure in your life. So why the hell should we listen? And to me that's still a very very powerful argument. What I'm trying to point out is that the reason why we should listen is that we've bought some massive story that it can't be anything else but that, because of the deep lying epistemological story. It's not because either our best explanation in science and human life are projectionist, because they aren't, and my point is that the domain which I call the 'best account principle'—the things which make the best account of what ought to be the reference point experience of all these things we believe ... well, if the reference point experiences here explain and operate in a way in ourselves which points away from theory A, what's the reason to believe in theory A? It's part and parcel of the whole upsetting the metaphysical apple cart that we are so deeply embedded in. They believe whatever is generated by their last impression. This whole account is holding them captive, and the argument is meant to say, 'why are you, why do you feel constrained?'

MH: Let me try and switch tracks here if that's all right. Do you consider any thinkers, particularly theologians, as formative in your own thought processes? Are there any strong affinities?

CT: I haven't read lots of them, but the people that I've read and are deeply interested in are de Lubac, Henri de Lubac, and Congar. They are people of a previous generation. I read them a number of years ago, and they had a very deep influence on me. And I guess that through them I'm plugged into a sort of tradition of French Catholicism of one strand, the strand of anti-Jansenists of the 17th century and on. I would love to have read more, and intend to read much more in theology. In my whole take on this I certainly have a great affinity to these people.

MH: What particularly in their theology do you find compelling? The way they were wrestling with Aquinas?

CT: Well, it wasn't so much their wrestling with Aquinas as the way that they seem to me to be wrestling with modern thought ... their conceptions of history, the Church in history, of the conceptions of the Church, of what Christian Church was as a corporate body in history of a mystical body. And I suppose one way of looking at it is de Lubac's work *Catholicism*, which is a marvellous work. I think of catholicism as the wholeness ... that as what gathers together all human experience in history and is therefore always incomplete. And so the take on modernity which I have, I could have written that from another standpoint—this theological standpoint about not seeing modernity just either as the boosters or the knockers, and neither simply on its own terms nor simply as the decline of the previous outlook which was Christian. The stance of the Church to it ought to be the stance of the Jesuits entering China, which was, 'we really don't understand this, but there is something remarkable here ... let's find out what it is, and then try and say what the Gospel is in relation to that.' That also ought to be the stance to modernity, except that's ridiculous because so much of it ushers from

Christianity and beyond. But what I mean to say is that it is not just a shotgun judgement, that whatever involves deviation from the previous foundations of Christian faith has to be somehow a falling-off, and this proposes that we roll it back to the previous age. The affinity I felt for that kind of view of Congar and de Lubac is one of the very important things. And they get it from this whole tradition of Saint Francis of Sales, and that whole tradition which therefore included the French Jesuits and therefore was very strongly attacked by the Jansenists who thought they were selling the past to unbelief, etc. I feel a great allegiance to that intellectual and spiritual tradition as it has gone down through the ages with different changes.

MH: That's a fascinating dichotomy. The idea of dogma versus some kind of multicultural understanding is relevant here. You come out in your work as promoting this dialectical intercourse of flushing out and articulating hypergoods, one hypergood succeeding another hypergood and cancelling it out, etc. Now within the Christian tradition as you just mentioned there is this idea of holding onto the past and holding onto the goods of the past, and a lot of these are set up as dogma. And I'm wondering where the balance in your mind comes, when at the same time as affirming these goods we are denying other goods.

CT: I think that again the criteria is *catholicity* in the way I understand it. Catholicity is the attempt towards a church in which the whole range of Christian spiritualities—those that we now imagine, those that we have not yet imagined—can coexist. And therefore we both maximally concentrate our understanding on what's at stake here, and maximally try to reframe the issues so that they aren't put into opposition to each other as either/or. An example of how not to do it is my definition of heresy. Heresy means choice. What's wrong with the choice is the kind of choice that says that these two are incompatible and this is the right one and we have to choose it. In a way I think the reformers, Luther, Calvin and so on (this may sound sectarian) are paradigm examples of heretics, because they had something very valid, a

certain spirituality of the Bible for instance which is tremendously valid. But they felt they had to present that in a way that put a torch to the monastic vocations, understanding of the Mass, The Sacraments. They sort of torched the house down in order to have this room, and they are not by any means alone in this kind of error. The Catholic Church itself tends to do the same thing the other way around. It tends to torch out the Biblical spirituality in order to preserve its other stuff, and the goal of *catholicity* is the goal of continually understanding how these things properly really are. This takes a great deal of spiritual maturity, of growth and prayer, and not just trusting one's first-off logic. Being able to see the work of the Spirit there, and then see how it can coexist ... and in the actual Catholic Church there are extraordinarily different things which manage to coexist ... which are good examples ... and then other things are included which oughtn't to be. So dogma is important wherever. What dogma does is keep the doors open in that there are Catholic dogmas like the Sacrament of the Mass which is very important if the issue is closing that chapter by simply taking an extreme Calvinist as some kind of commemorative rite. Making that point so that you can go on underpinning that spirituality is very important. It's very hard to make a judgement here, but if the aim is to close off possibilities then it is very negative in its consequences, so the Church has to go on protecting certain definitions in order to keep the whole gamut of spiritualities alive, and that also must be very careful about not foreclosing on others.

MH: Yes, obviously I think there is a trickiness in policy versus spirituality. We have the vantage point of history in that we can see events like the heresy whereby they are not irreconcilable with the truth of catholicity; what about in modern times, when we don't have this objective advantage of reflection?

CT: We can have that, that's why it's a very good thing to travel to some extent spiritually, maybe in time maybe in space, and begin to acquaint ourselves with the whole or anyway a large swatch of Christian spiritualities. Then outside of our very parochial view we get a better take on, get a better feel for,

these spiritualities. The more you have a feel for a larger number of these spiritualities the more you can recognise new ones or not fail to recognise them, or misrecognise them, or just shut them out. And the more we narrow ourselves into a certain set, that we develop in our particular bit of the Church, the more we are likely to take the shotgun and just shoot from the hip at whatever comes along and looks even mildly different, and shoot it out of the water. And I think that we in the modern age see one of the advantages along with the so-called disadvantage of all this diversity around us, and all these things we have at our finger tips. We can get at anything by just pushing a few keys. Well the advantage of that is that you can do this kind of travelling, we can open up different spiritualities to ourselves, we are not stuck in some small community where nothing can be taught except X, Y, Z. So we have recourse to do this. There are certain problems to this in that we could lose our bearings, but there are also resources to overcome this. And lots of people are following this, our spiritualities arise which involve this kind of exploring.

MH: Do you think that would tend to wash out your spirituality in some instances? I can see a lot of people who find the idea of a very strict, small pocket of a community with black and white guidelines very attractive because they know where they are. They know where they stand, they are not exploring and they can see the advantage of that.

CT: Sure, that's where I think the kind of church order in people who feel they want to do this, and who recognise that it's their way and not other people's way, would be ideal. On a slightly different level, certain monastic orders do that. You get the Trappist order—they're not saying there isn't anything good in talking, but there are certain temptations and certain difficulties and certain distractions for *their* spiritual path that they need to cut out. So they accept this very rigid discipline in which these things are cut out. And that is how it should be. I do not think ... it's not like the reformer's attitude, because it's not my way ... I do not think that one would knock that aside. At the same

time what's interesting and what's good is that they're not saying that it would be unchristian not to do this, and if you don't do this you're a heretic. They're saying this is a very important way and it's really important for us and if anyone wants to join us fine; but it's not for everybody and we will pray for and offer our spiritual guidance for anyone who wants to follow another path. It's that kind of coexistence which I think is real *catholicity*, where one can recognise that this is a way but not necessarily *the* way ... and there is a sense of the Gospel that is not narrowed into that form, and when that happens disaster strikes and both sides get edgy.

MH: That seems to be the most rewarding kind of ecumenical exercise.

CT: Yeah, but it has to be a two way street. There are people outside these particular groups who themselves bring these judgements on these people, saying they're neurotic, etc.. Take the way that certain kinds of very strict Born Again Protestantism in the States has developed this very unfortunate adversarial relationship to everybody else including the mainline churches. Here the narrowness is very much on both sides because these people are saying 'Everyone else is going to rot in hell,' and so on; but these other people are saying 'These other people are just neurotics, they can't face the modern world.' But it could be looked at as a certain spiritual battle involving discipline, and why not? It's not my way, but why not? Well it has to be both sides that would move on this. This side would accept the legitimacy of this, and the other side accept the legitimacy of the other side. The dynamic of the feeling is that their Christian faith is being attacked so of course they are going to defend the Christian faith. So it becomes *the* faith and their dynamic produces a situation where neither side can really make the 'catholic' gesture in this way of understanding catholicity. You can see how the dynamic can drive a wedge here.

MH: That's interesting because I grew up in that exact environment of rigidity of the us/them gap.

CT: Yeah, it's not so much produced by the mainline churches as unbelieving liberal east coast ... I've got all these words that are the worst concepts of progress ... but it's true that the picture presented of these people in the New York Times is a terrible caricature. So you can understand how this thing gets set up and it's very hard to talk across the gap. I try and explain to my American liberal friends: 'See how you're engaged in (De Tocqueville used this expression) "cultural civil war", but it's on both sides?' [but they say], 'What do you mean it's on both sides!!? We're being attacked all the time and people are shooting abortion clinic doctors, etc.' [And I say], 'Yeah, but at the same time look at the way you caricature these people all the time. You can see how it's provoking them.' And they can't see that. And I suppose if I sat down with some of the hard-liners from the other side they wouldn't see it either. So they get in this position and they just can't see that it's a total caricature of the other party.

APPENDIX C

Transcript of Interview

No. 3: 10/10/95

MH: I thought it would be interesting to continue with what we were talking about last week, and that was the idea of dogma and Catholicism. Last week we were getting into the area of best accounts, and I was wondering if you thought that in order to live in a community like Catholicism, does one need to have a shared best account with others?

CT: Well it's very hard to say what the answer to that would be. At one level 'yes', at another level 'no'. There are all these different interpretations which are in contest with each other. On the other hand they have common reference points, they have common texts, the Bible, all sorts of tradition they are trying to interpret and argue with each other. But in philosophical terms of the best account, there are certainly really big differences. There are people that feel that any allowance for a hermeneutical dimension in revelation is some kind of cop-out. You have to smash through, to puncture the hermeneutical activity, or it isn't revelation. But possibly there aren't terribly many of those in the Catholic Church, though there have been. And so on this score you have a big difference, but nevertheless, what ties them together is that there are certain key elements of tradition that both accept.

MH: So they both have a similar best account?

CT: Yeah.

MH: Now going from that sort of model into a more global idea, de Lubac talks about false religions and the idea of conversion. Do you follow in that vein, are there false religions in your mind? Is there a case for dialoguing with them, is there a need for conversion?

CT: Well, I think there certainly are false religions. I don't see how anyone could deny that. But the issue is 'is anything that is not the Christian religion just *ipso facto* a false religion?'. And there I think one has to be spiritually empirical, just note whether some other traditions nourish a certain kind of spiritual fullness. It seems to me unquestionably that some do. And I think we've talked about this before, where you go from here is not entirely clear. I don't think we should necessarily expect it to be entirely clear. We shouldn't say 'If we can't solve this problem we've made a terrible mistake.' It's not clear exactly what God's doing. He's not relating it to us, but maybe we are not expected to understand it. So a great deal of respect is necessary, and I think there is something very important in trying to understand them [other religions], but also learn some things from them that we can live out. But thirdly, even where it's very clear that there are differences that we have to recognise that oppose each other where we can't learn, where we have to cease to follow the same spiritual path, even there, we gain a great deal from recognising that there is something spiritually great there that isn't our way. And what we learn is that ... let me put it this way, there's a lot of very facile affirmation of one's own tradition which is based simply on negative judgements about others. So for years people who believed in God thought that people who didn't must be somehow morally questionable, and Christians thought that Jews were just simply fixated on the Law, and that Buddhist and Hindus were just totally 'other-worldly'. We all have these stories whereby our own faith, our own position, is shored out by what turns out in examination to be ludicrously uncomplementary. And when you liberate yourself from those crutches, then the way to carry on with one's own faith is for it to be a *live* one for itself, as against one of these contrasting moves. So I think it's a very important enlivening and liberating move to liberate ourselves from these denigrating stories that we've told about others. But of course there are false religions, others like Jones at Jonestown. I mean why go to extreme cases which are obviously really terrible? So it's not a

position of principle. It's very much one where you have to be open to spiritual depth and greatness where it exists and also its opposite.

MH: So would you say that there is a need for conversion, but not in the strict sense of converting to what de Lubac would call the 'holy ark of salvation', but more a conversion to a spiritual integrity maybe?

CT: Yeah, or it's more complicated than that because I think the Gospel has to be preached everywhere. People's path everywhere might be different, and we can't presume that it isn't from the beginning. And naturally as a Christian I want to share that kind of corporate view of de Lubac and others, but there's something absolutely indispensable being done in God's name by the Buddhist. But it would appear there are other elements of that that I don't understand, and I would just respect without believing that I have to understand them all. So therefore it has to be all this, because it's the only thing I can understand, and the others would just be swept up and done away with. We need an agnosticism at this point, and I think honestly, in spiritual humility, we have to accept and articulate that that's where we are.

MH: last week you mentioned the analogy of approaching modernity somewhat in the same way that the Jesuits went into China. That is, we don't understand what's going on here, but we will try and become Chinese, etc. De Lubac talks about Christianity in its early form absorbing the culture of Antiquity, so that we can't talk about Paul's Epistles without the ideas of what was going on in Tarsus and Rome at the time. Do you see Christianity today as doing the same kind of thing, as absorbing modernity? You qualified that last week by saying it's funny in a way because there is so much of historical Christianity inbred in modernity.

CT: Yeah, that's right, so it's a very different situation from going to China or going from the totally Jewish background to the Hellenistic background. It's very different because a lot of it is a spin-off, so that makes it very much harder of a certain mindset, because to the extent that it's a spin-off it

involves some negation of the Christian faith. But my view is that, paradoxical as it may seem, and as mind bending as it may seem, part of the consequence of it spinning off and no longer being totally congruent with the Christian Church message Gospel and so on, has been the development of certain potentialities—things like the political culture of human rights and universality of rights which was rather difficult to combine with the historical Church of late—and that has managed to develop to some extent outside these elite springs, and now in some sense ought to be recognised by people who are still in the Church. Pope John Paul has done this as well. This is what we ought to have been saying all along, but let's not pretend that we *were* saying it all along. It's something that's partly alien. So we have to go to school to a certain degree with this alien element even as the Jesuits did, but with this difference. It's harder to accept that because it's a question of all this pride and priority.

MH: So do you think a lot of these things like universality, benevolence—some of these modern virtues—are foreign to the original Christian ideals?

CT: No, retrospectively they seem to be developing.

MH: It's just that they weren't fully articulated through the Early Church?

CT: Yes, and they were kept put away, they were hedged in by other features of those earlier societies that had something to be said for them but nevertheless also needed to be broken open for these things fully to develop. The churches as they developed historically have got such a degree of symbiosis with them that it was very difficult for them to break out. You get this kind of move in history. It's very clear that the very early churches did things in the social realm which none of the other associations did, such as homes for widows and orphans ... kind of an early welfare state. Charitable organisations and so on started to exist on a level that they had never existed before in the early Christian churches, and in a way you could see some of the campaigns today for universal beneficence, Amnesty International etc., being some kind of

continuation of that, with all the problems involved with that ... and sometimes the questionable aspects of that, I'm not denying that. But I think that that is an important step forward, but that kind of universal activism presupposed something which grew up in the modern break-up of Christianity and that is—a questionable thing too—the very high degree of confidence in our own power of remaking things. The limits of what had to be taken of the way things are have been pushed way aside, in these massive attempts to change the whole ecological communal development of common interest. They just go in there and turn it around. There's faults with this, and there are problems with this which are directly involved with, what we could argue from a Christian point of view, its negation of the Christian sense of limit. At the same time, to the extent that the sense of limit was founded just on a lack of imagination, conservative structures and so on, getting rid of that is something very important. So what we need is not just this culture exactly as it is, nor do the Jesuits say 'We'll take China exactly as it is.' They wanted to make a change. but to this culture as well as positively developing a recuperating within the Church in the sense that de Lubac says. Could you have the sense that on one level everything is possible that involved structural organisational barriers—what we all think of as limits to our thinking and how to deal with them—and at the same time not have this idea that human beings are terminally masters of their history, that our own spiritual development is irrelevant to this ... because if you really want to know the best organisation, the best game plan, then you work out whether our motivations are good or bad, and they're factored out ... all these catastrophic errors (hubris I guess) ... can that be negated and bottled while at the same time [we] benefit from the way in which the barriers to our thinking actually work out?

MH: I want to ask you about Natural Law and bring in the idea of Plato. Something that triggered this off is reading de Lubac and his idea of catholicism as an all inclusive idea: 'religion itself'. He says 'Catholicism is that which humanity must put on in order finally to be itself', and it reminded me of your lectures

on Plato. In the beginning we had to keep in mind that for Plato the human is someone who has a concept of the Good and has a yearning for the Good so that the bad person intellectually has an inconsistency within his person, and Socrates as the gadfly tries to bring this out. Immediately it brought to mind the way you do philosophy—bringing to the fore what is implicit in the statements we make and the way we live. Plato is working with a very specific idea of natural order, with a telos and reflected Ideas. I was wondering if you are working with the same kind of assumptions when doing philosophy.

CT: Well sort of, but not quite. See I think that both Plato and Aristotle have a picture of human nature which is in itself perfect order prescribed, harmonious and there doesn't seem to be any strain to tendencies which we can't, if we have the proper wisdom, see how to work itself out. I think that's not the human condition. I think that on the one hand there are these images of order ... showing up different in history is what the ordered life is, and lots of them ought to be taken very seriously up to a point. A lot of wisdom and insight of human life is attached to them. But the right call of humanity itself, the ultimate vocation of human beings, passes beyond what we can find in all of those because the shift from the anthropocentric to the theocentric is such a tremendous shift. Or if it doesn't it involves living those orders in a completely different fashion than we can imagine now. So the idea that we can give it all in a formula now through man's eyes which can be coherently laid out, mapped with a vertical and a horizontal, seems to me to be wrong. There is a principle of great disturbance always entering into human life, our best constructed analysis always has this principle of disturbance, and therefore there is an act of faith involved. So I neither want to just sweep all these notions of order aside—I think you can't even get clear about where you are if we try and do that, all philosophy that tries to do that is a failure—but nor do I think we can take one as being what the total answer to human nature is about.

MH: So would you say that there is order in the ideal human state, but it's unknowable? It's not caught up in the realm of mere mortals?

CT: Yeah, that may be it, I'm not sure which is the best way of putting that about which I think our understanding is so limited. So I'm hesitant, because perhaps you could put it as there is an ultimate order which we don't understand now which all the orders we do understand are partial distortions of, or maybe it's that ultimately being with God transcends all order. I'm not quite sure how to put it. There are these strong intuitions of what it is to be a human being, of human life: friendship is better than enmity, the unexamined life isn't worth living, etc., etc. There are certain virtues which it is good to develop, fulfilling your potential is a terribly important demand, and these are notions of the good life that are very persuasive, but as soon as they begin to present themselves as self-sufficient—that there is no demand beyond that, that there might be in the renunciation of my fulfilment as against simply an inexplicable self-pleasure or that in the failure to fulfil myself something might come about bringing myself and my humanity closer to God in the very act of failure, or suffering—something very important might be happening, which just gets beyond your horizon if you think that that's all there is to say in your conception of the human life. The shutting out of those is not only wrong and erroneous, not only losing sight of something, but also can be terribly destructive. So the belief that we've got it all worked out kind of makes me very nervous.

MH: Do you see parallels between the way you do philosophy—for instance the way you dialogue with people like Richard Rorty and say 'Wait, what you just said, if you bring that to fruition, will have your whole argument unravelling before you'—and the way Plato jabs at his opponents with their own inconsistencies? I think it is quite a remarkable characteristic in the way you do your philosophy. You don't just say 'You're wrong' and put them off to one side. There is this engaging in an attempt to flesh out the truth in a way

which has tremendous faith in this principle of inconsistency which will eventually arise.

CT: Yeah, I think we all have experiences which negate these two partial views. It is a matter of trying to bring them out. Experiences are shared, so if we bring them out we can ideally convince them that there is something missing. There I agree with Plato, we all have this tendency in us and it's a matter of finding the forms it takes, and that's another reason to be tremendously open to this variety of human ways of being. Any situation has built into it a negation so you can get inside it and say 'well what's this doing here?'

MH: That's one place where I see difficulty in the analogy between the way the early Christian Church absorbed its culture and the way we as modernists are meant to absorb ours. In the Early Church positing a divine being wasn't a problem, the idea of transcendence now is really something to wrestle with.

APPENDIX D

Transcript of Interview

No. 4: 17/10/95

MH: I wanted to talk a little bit about the affirmation of everyday life. Basically it's been a very pervasive idea in politics particularly very recently with both the right and the left side, people like Newt Gingrich and Tony Blair coming from opposite extremes. It's also been very heavily secularised as you know, and I was wondering if in your own mind that matters as far as affirming it, or do you still hold onto the trappings of its origin, and if so to what extent?

CT: Yeah, I think there is an impoverishment that takes place when it's taken out of that context ... an impoverishment as there always is when something is taken out of that context. But there is another side to this argument. We've talked about this before ... sometimes some of these moral visions or moral points can be also carried further because the context of Christian belief in fact went along with (and it's hard to see how it could avoid going along with in its context) ... Well I guess another way of putting it is the idea of Christendom as a society that is totally Christian—and there is always something dangerously restrictive and one-sided about any idea of Christendom—and that the idea of Christendom involves the use of force. So patently I would argue that the case of the human rights universality and unconditionality of rights, the existence of breaking open Christendom, the existence of pluralism in the original context, meant that the rejection of religion allowed the development of certain understandings of human rights as universal and unconditional way beyond what they ever could have achieved in the context of Christendom. So in wrenching them out there are gains and there are losses. There's gains because the idea went through a development that we have to approve of, that we have to consider plausible. On the other hand, in taking it out of that context, you lose a whole vision of

why it's so important, and nothing I think as good has been substituted since. So there are gains and there are losses. Similarly, the affirmation of ordinary life, the idea of the relief of suffering again unconditionally and universally, which is very much an *idée philosophique*, a powerful idea in the 20th century ... which is why world campaigns for famine and Somalia and that kind of thing can get mobilised ... obviously we need modern communication, modern television and modern planes and so on in order to make that a real option. Nevertheless, we have to understand culturally and morally why this option really is taken up in certain parts of the world and not yet in others, and that's because we have developed certain notions of the value of ordinary life, one facet of which is the relief of suffering the preservation of life, just life as such, the relief of suffering. And yeah, maybe this too is more unconditional and more universal as it has broken out of Christendom, but there is an impoverishment of the spiritual understanding of this. We've had gains and we've had losses. You can't just look at it in one of these lights.

MH: So how sympathetic would you be to some of the immediate Reformers, someone like Luther who was seeing man as a *homo religiosus*, affirming the everyday life in the context of the created order, the *ontic logos*.

CT: I think I have exactly the same thing to say about that with different examples, that there are gains and there are losses. There was this tremendous gain of seeing ordinary life in that way. It was there already in a way, but it was given much more play. In other words it was in relation to some of the earlier insights in the idea of *orare est laborare* and so on—it was in relation to them, you might say, as universal rights of the human today are to the more timid movements in Christendom which were conditional on being part of the majority religion etc., etc. So there was a sort of breaking forth. At the same time there were also very destructive elements, an impoverishment, because the whole range of celibate vocations was just put in the trash can. Now, if you like, the range of different spiritualities in the Church was radically

reduced—that was the loss. The gain was a focus on the narrow range, things about it, an intensity and so on which were never brought out before. So it seems that we have this repeated set of events in history and what sense to take on it. But at that moment, if you're Erasmus or someone, and trying to keep the whole thing together, then you lose out. But in the long run it's possible to have a more fully Catholic Church as a result of this, if you can find a way back from these developments and reincorporate them in a broader understanding of what the spirituality of the Church is ... get over the adversarial relationship which got set up where nobody could at one and the same time, it would appear, appreciate the good in the celibate vocations, and appreciate the spirituality in the other. It seems to be not possible in the end. But it could be, if we stand back from all this and get ourselves out of the purely adversarial partisan relationship (and the same thing to Christians in relation to secular modernity, the same point can be made) ... we can reappropriate all this.

MH: I'm wondering if we really can in terms of secular modernity do the same thing. I can see it easily happening in the Christian community because they are sharing this model of the world, but can we look at thinkers in the secular arena today who are affirming everyday life, or the good in and of itself without any restriction or points of reference, and say 'that's all right'?

CT: No, never, obviously there has to be some amendment to it to put it back in its context. We just have to have the honesty, veracity or clear-sightedness, or the humility, or all of the above and more, to face the fact that although we have amendments to make now, it's lucky that we didn't prevail—I mean we as representatives of Christendom, we didn't prevail. Something has emerged out of our not prevailing earlier, and being able to put it then in a context we understood because that would have kept it from flowering, in other words yielding all its fruit. Now it's yielded a lot of lousy fruit along with the good fruit, and that's still mixed up in it, so we have to make a criticism of it, try and put it in another context. But if this is done in a triumphalist spirit where

we say 'The whole escape from our tradition, the first step, was a mistake and now all the bad things are a result of that'—if we kind of peel it back like that—we are not really being truthful with ourselves or the situation, and it will make it harder to convince people. They are just seeing it as a roll back. There is already constantly this reaction among secularly-minded people that any attempt to put it in this Christian context amounts to your rolling back to the middle ages, the Inquisition. These hyper-heated rhetorics pick this as their reference point.

MH: I'm wondering if we can see the affirmation of everyday life as a good with a reference point in the way that they [secularists] do. I can't really see how to marry the two. There are people on one side who want to say 'this is all baggage we need to get rid of it. Universal beneficence is good in itself, and we can work on that.' And on the other hand, you can strongly argue that if you don't have certain limitations or certain ideas behind universal beneficence, that it falls apart, and can even become a monster, a vehicle for destruction. So these people over here [Christians] are working with an assumed order of some kind. How can we convince these people over here [secularists], not necessarily that their idea is not going to work, but that there needs to be some kind of order, if not the kind that was set up before, something along the same lines as before.

CT: Yeah, but is that what we really want to say? Your point is bringing out something very interesting, and I hadn't thought of it quite in these terms. There are two kinds of things people could say. There is a criticism of the certain type of very polemical secular understanding of beneficence. One of them is the point about limitations and a certain kind of order, enframed in a certain way. And I see a point about that, for instance if you focus on the wild grab of wanting to control it all. We say, 'Hey, wait a minute we have to accept certain limitations, there are other things as well you have to think of: you're riding roughshod over a whole bunch of other goods.' Though here I'm not even sure a certain order is necessary. It's just necessary to make

people sensitive to these other goods, make people sensitive to human limitations, make people sensitive to what monsters they become when they ignore these. You could have just said to Lenin, 'Look, human beings need to be able to come to some of these great new forms of society with some degree of free and spontaneous growth, and what you've done is totally foreclose that. Everything is totally controlled. You're going to produce monsters. You are going to produce a situation in which the people in power are monsters, and the other people are just terrified. Just don't think of the goal and how great it is and the fastest way to get there instrumentally.' So there is a discourse that could use the notion of order, but this drive of conflicts of other goals and human limitations and so on is another criticism which is very meaningful to me, which is the one I find in Dostoyevsky—which I talk about in the end of *Sources*—which gets to the very heart of beneficence. What is the motor which allows you to go on and on putting demands on yourself to help others, either in the situation of a social worker, doctor, or if you're spending a lot of time raising money for Oxfam and so on? And the issue is, what people often run on is a certain sense their own human dignity, and maybe a certain sense of human dignity in general, where they wouldn't feel good about themselves if they weren't, they would be ashamed of themselves if they weren't, but they feel good about themselves because they are. And it's very much focused on their own sense of the self. That is one of the very powerful motivations which is mobilised by all the secular ideology of this kind and there are severe limitations to that, severe limitations to how far that can carry you. And here we get to the real crunch of the difference of view, I guess. The vision of Dostoyevsky, as I see it, putting it in my terms, is what you need in order to carry through on this is an acute sense of human beings as objects of love, objects of God's love that you can participate in. That empowers you in a way that the ordinary human secular sources cannot, because at a certain point ... the sense of your own dignity has certain limits ... and how far it can carry you. A sense of general human dignity is an extremely dangerous double edged thing, because you've also got to take into

account why people never live up to that. So if you're moved by the sense of human beings having a wonderfully great potential, faced with actual human material we keep dealing with—that has over and over again flipped over into a sense of anger and contempt for these actual human beings which links up to the other thing we were talking about—that is part of what motivates us to take over and get it done, control it, treat these people like human raw material. So what this rambling discourse is trying to get at is there's another issue of what's missing in the secular age which is not limits, but what allows you to go beyond certain kinds of limits. What allows Mother Theresa ... in this film they asked her, 'How do you do it, when you see these people lying in the gutter, how do you manage to bring yourself to this?' And she said, 'Well, they're the image of God.' Now that's a very banal answer, but the difference is she really felt that. I could have said that, you could have said that, but she really meant that, she really felt that. Now what is it to feel that? This is something that takes us beyond motivations available to the secular human being. So the whole issue is 'Does human beneficence with the goal it sets itself really meet their requirements? Is it always going to be turning into something too limited or dangerously controlling if it just runs on the fumes, as it were?' And this is a subject that is incredibly difficult to raise. I raised this problem at the end of *Sources*, and I've had I don't know how many secular-minded people in this discussion of what I call moral sources—in 99 cases out of a 100, they don't know what I'm talking about. Because they just don't raise this issue. They think it slides back into criteria: 'Why does he want us to believe in God, and does that give us a criteria?' ... No it doesn't give you a criteria. If you recognise something, if you recognise a certain human movement that comes out, you don't need God for that. I suppose they think that the only issue is how do we train people to interiorise certain standards ... how do we find the right standards—we need Immanuel Kant or something—and then how do we interiorise the standards? And that's a matter of people getting it built into their own sense of self, and if we do that all right then it's fine. And Dostoyevsky to me has a vision of the tremendous

dangers involved in this. Nietzsche also has a sense of how surface benevolence can be powered by all sorts of things which aren't benevolence, and this issue of what empowers you to do that is where a tremendously important part of the criticism comes from and that has nothing to do with bringing it back into some order. See, in bringing it back into some order ... we think that Christendom had a kind of order and everything fit in to a place, and now these things have burst out, and they're all over the place and that's the problem. That's part of the problem, but another part of the problem is they haven't burst out enough. There are these images in the Bible, the tongues of fire at Pentecost, that just burst the limits and that's part of the movement of God too. And what we have here is something much more aware of how it's limiting it, and damping things down. Though the other is also true.

MH: When I was talking of limits I was thinking on this side of the self-determining freedom that has risen up from this whole movement. Suddenly we've got this mechanistic universe and everything is internalised, all our sentiments, and it's very important to realise our own potential, and be free to fulfil our goals. But I can see on the flip-side that yours is a very crucial point.

CT: I'm confused because I can see very good criticism in both directions, but they seem to be opposite. That point of everyone being themselves and so on, shorn of some sense of being plugged into something greater ... what one notices about that is that all the people who are being themselves look terribly similar, and saints aren't similar to each other because there is something working in their lives which is much bigger than they are. And when you have everyone trying to be themselves in this very narrow ideological cage ... yeah, from one point of view they are not respecting certain demands on themselves, certain limits. From another point of view they sink to a kind of conformity, and the two are not entirely unrelated. The world goes dead if you only believe in individual freedom, because the important differences between doing X and doing Y—even when they are suppose to be valuing

doing X or doing Y—the important differences just disappear. The example that always comes to mind is when people argue about homosexuality, for instance, when they argue the case for non-discrimination against homosexuals (which I'm entirely in favour of as a principle). But the way it is argued is—and the very words used to turn sexual orientation into another kind of indifferent way of going one way or another like some people like blondes and some like brunettes—it's indifferent. Whereas in the actual experience at least of heterosexual love, human beings can be linked—here we're back to ordinary life—can be linked to the locus of a great spiritual development, so you can't look at it as just one way of doing things. This is not to say that seeing the spiritual value of this requires that you dump on homosexuality as being evil and perverted and so on. I'm a little bit at a loss as to what to say about that and people who are turned that way. But it does mean that making a home for even-handedness by this flattening out, this indifferentising of these things, involves a terrible price. And interesting enough there is on the homosexual side the so-called 'queers' as opposed to the so-called 'gays'. Some of the 'queers' theorists are people who want to hang onto the idea that there is something special to this, that it shouldn't be levelled down. They don't want to be just domesticated as another kind of marriage. It's very interesting that they themselves fight against this flattening. But when heterosexuals do, they very often either get attacked for it or get caught up on the side of extremely repressive people who want to just lead a large discourse of evil perversion and pugnality; and somehow in this situation we've lost the space where we can have a sense of saying 'No, you can't justify a civilised legal relation here on the basis of indifference, you've got to find another way of doing it.' A similar thing can be said about culturalism—'If it ends up just being run by a Muslim tradition it doesn't matter, it's a thing of your choice.' That's why a lot of Muslims and very strongly believing Christians resent the whole language of public secular space because it seems to be predicated on making the whole thing 'some people are into chess, some people are into beer drinking, other people are

into Christianity', and it's just this kind of flattening that is what is involved. And what that links up with is a certain ideology of freedom above all which is won at the expense of flattening out the things that freedom chooses between, which ends up with people whose lives are just not interestingly different from other lives because anything that might have made them different has been switched off and devalued. So both directions of criticism seem to be possible here. On the one hand accept certain limitations, on the other hand, open yourselves to a much more exciting and different, and terrifying, and awe-inspiring place the universe is. We need to burst through. The free subject is entirely encased in this armour, and nothing breaks through or phases it, and that's an incredibly cramped way to be. That's what strikes me strongly about modern unbelief. If you've read the *Brothers Karamazov*, it's Ivan whose the one who is tragically caught in the move that flattens the universe.

MH: Let me bring you back to something we were talking about—the possibility of Protestants affirming the monastic life. There being a destruction of this hierarchy in one sense but also an affirmation of all goods in this way reminds me of something that I read recently. It was a criticism of this affirmation by Stanley Hauerwas. Let me just read this from *Dispatches From the Front*. This is a chapter called 'Killing Compassion' where he brings up this point, and quotes you about the affirmation of everyday life leading to this uncontrolled beneficence which he says is quite dangerous. There's an excerpt here from *Sources*: 'Once the notion of order becomes paramount it makes no more sense to give them a crucial status in religious life. It becomes an embarrassment to religion that should be bound to belief in particular events which divide one group from another and/or in any case open to cavil. The great truths of religion are all universal. Reason extracts these from the general course of things. A gap separates these realities of universal import on the particulate facts of history. These latter cannot support the former.' (*Sources of the Self*, p.273) And then he says, 'What is extraordinary about Taylor's analysis is how it helps us see why any Christian account of love

necessarily suffers a loss of a Christological centre, not because of science, but because of the moral presuppositions commensurate to the valuation of everyday life.' (*Dispatches from the Front*, p.173) Do you see where he's going there?

CT: I don't see where he's going at all. I'm talking about something quite different. Is that a quote from me about the universal and the particular?

MH: Yes.

CT: Yes, I was talking about something else. I was talking about the 18th century Deism, and blessing and so on.

MH: Getting into a sort of external order of God?

CT: Yeah, the Deistic view of God, which certainly has a complex linkage with the affirmation of everyday life in its advance as it moves into the Enlightenment.

MH: Let me read a bit more: 'If we are to create compassionate societies in which the value of each individual is thought to be equal to other individuals, then we must devalue the extraordinary.' Which is basically what we were just talking about.

CT: Uh, huh, that is Nietzsche too.

MH: 'The extraordinary ... comes in the form of extraordinary people as well as events.' So what he's getting at is if we affirm the everyday life to the point of compassion or universal benevolence there's this danger of cancelling out great figures, particular the figure in the centre of Christianity. So ... I am not really sure how he hooks that up with love ... but do you see that as a danger?

CT: Yeah, I think that what he is hitting at I would agree with. I think what he is hitting at is this secular reduction of benevolence to a set of goals of relieving suffering, say, and then we see how to get this done as effectively as possible.

In effect, once we get the goals then instrumental reason kicks in and we see how to do this as effectively as possible; and what it runs on in the way of human motivation is our sense of ourselves, value of ourselves, as people who want to do this. Then you have something which has flattened out a lot of the universe in the course of getting to this goal. Now this is one of the things that eventually is from the affirmation of everyday life, but that is a much richer and multifaceted notion than this. So I think he has just used an unfortunate word in terms of what I was trying to say, but I see there is something, a target that he's hitting there. The answers aren't reduced by unbelieving enlightenment to a set of goals of relieving suffering universally so that instrumental kicks in and nothing else is allowed into this set of goals. That does devalue the extraordinary.

MH: Jean Bethke Elshtain brings out a similar point in her essay in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, but she mentions it all along the lines of the sovereign state. I have one more question which has to do more with the way you flesh this out in *The Ethics of Authenticity*. The idea of affirming everyday life which comes into self-fulfilment in production and labour etc. ... how do we marry that with the central focus of loving God with all your heart and loving your neighbour as yourself?

CT: Well what the Gospel seems to reveal is that one of the things that comes from being really decentred and theocentred is that you have a love for the world, other people, such that no human being's ever dreamt of such a powerful love. So that means that once you have that intuition of course you can also feel bound to do certain things for other people that go beyond what you would normally. It's part of what's motivating you to do this, it's what you're moving towards, and exactly how much you do that and how much you try and change yourself. It's one of these judgements about spiritual paths that I think we can't give totally general prescriptions about. But at the end of all this, how can there be a conflict if we think that this man reveals to us what God is and there is this revelation of the incredible act of giving, this

kenosis? So I don't see how the two can be pitted against each other in the light of that.

MH: I think they have been in the generations Alan Bloom raged against. The 'me' generation, and 'the kids these days are just out to get what they can'—their own goods, their own rights. So what you're saying is if we really understood what authenticity means it would be nothing but to understand it in these terms.

CT: I also think it isn't entirely true or fair to this generation to level against it a 'me' orientation that is totally unconcerned. There is an idea of 'flower power' relations which are devoid of power. But there are a lot of people out there, that are the same people into being themselves and doing their own thing, who have the idea that when you get away from some of these structures you will have this wonderful beneficence, unhung-up, un-hateful relationship. So the original idea was marching on in more and more distorted variants, but it is the original idea that coming to yourself and being what you are as a human being, working in the family and so on, is also linked immediately in the original Protestant congregations with good, and something of this link is still there with cheaper and cheaper—or if you like, more and more extreme—variants. So the problem is in a lot of cases that you are unhooking some affirmation with some idea that you are doing good to the world, but what is needed is a reality check. Just what good are you doing to the world and what would require really to open yourself to others? And then this advances your benchmark immediately. It is clear that a lot has been shut down here. Sensitivity has been lost. The potential of being moved by it has been lost. And that's what's wrong with it. Once again I'm not trying to say this is the only way of coming at it, but I think you've got to complement coming at it with the 'hey, you're not recognising limits' direction with the 'hey, you're shutting down so much that's there' direction.

APPENDIX E

Transcript of Interview

No. 5: 24/10/95

MH: When I was first thinking about writing a Ph.D. I felt that agape was a very important central concept in Christian Ethics, and one of the first places I came across it was in the conclusion of *Sources*. I was wondering if you could expound your own views on agape, where it fits into moral theory.

CT: Well, it's not easy. I don't feel myself very theologically competent to talk about this, but I feel that what gets revealed in the Gospel, agape in the life of Christ As you know this was a word that had a minor role in Greek ordinary language, the kind of love and concern that means you take care of something. People talk about 'agapan' your wealth or your property and so on. This is in Classical and in ordinary Koine before the Gospels. So this word is taken and given this new slot where I suppose the ultimate understanding of what is involved in it is the love of God for us, which can be somehow taken up by us, and therefore we can participate in, therefore also have for others. And it is a kind of love that goes beyond any of these other human sources of love we understand, which in a sense always involve a degree of self-reference and self-fulfilment and so on. This seems to go beyond that all together. So it's this kind of power that transcends and goes beyond the way we normally feel ourselves limited, and so I see the place of this in human life as being another one of those places (or in terms of the Christian faith I suppose *the* key place) where we see a possible vocation for human beings that transcends, that goes beyond, that even breaks out of in a sense, the self, the ordinary way of operating as human beings. So it's a way in which we see a vocation for ourselves, a road for ourselves, that involves breaking beyond these normal vocations, and so its relation to our ethical understanding is the same uneasy one that any one of those paths proposed by

either Plato or Buddha and so on, are. That is, on the one hand we have ethical codes and principles that in a certain way domesticate that, are meant to be applicable and liveable by ordinary people in ordinary circumstances. You can ask of them only so much. On the other hand it opens a way which seems to burst the bounds of any of these ethical codes. So there's an unease about that which we are meant to be coping with—either sometimes trying to codify the supererogatory, and what goes beyond, which leads to either nonsense or absurdly high principles applied to ordinary people in ordinary circumstances. Or we run a two tiered idea in a way like the Reformers objecting in Christendom to the steerage class and the first class. Or—there's no easy way of dealing with this—we uneasily accept it. We're operating on these two levels all the time. It does prevent our having a perfectly self-imposed idea of human life, the perfect human life, which if properly lived would never run into contradictions, would never find itself at odds with something else which is good and valuable and important. Whereas in fact once you open the sky in one of these directions of self-transcendence, you're always running into these kinds of contradictions and tensions. To perfect our life according to the way things are morally in our society nevertheless can be morally very problematic because it can be a way of closing off this good life, being satisfied with that. In the New Testament there is always this volley attack on the Pharisees, but I don't think the Pharisees are in essence bad people, that the Pharisaic set of disciplines were in essence bad. On the contrary I sense they were good people, in a sense that's the message we're suppose to get: they were good people, and the publicans were better. But the paradox is that just being a very good person can be an ultimate trap. It closes off this window, this skylight.

MH: You mention somewhere towards the end of *Sources* the point that in having such high moral standards we need to have strong sources like agape. Divine affirmation is playing a big part in agape and yet you hint at secularised successions to agape, and I'm wondering if you have any particular ones in mind.

CT: Yeah, there's an ideal a model of benevolence as developed—benevolence/beneficence, that has developed since the 18th century—which is definitely post-theistic. That is it puts up in exactly the same way as in relation to the earlier honour ethic. Christian faith had this idea of infinite giving, not being concerned with honour. So the Enlightenment piggy-backed that, piggy-backed its criticism of the honour ethic and so on, and said that what really matters is beneficence, benevolence. Indeed, you even have with Bacon exactly this kind of opposition. Whereas you have an older ethos with this older notion of science which is based on pride, and 'whoopie! We've got the whole picture ... right aren't we great!' You have another kind of science which is based on believing in the condition of mankind. It's much more humble, an under-labourer kind of thing. Locke talked about this, the under-labourer would go around and do small things which actually improved the condition of mankind. And there precisely the motivation is charity—charity is the translation of agape, right? So you have this idea that the properly enlightened—this is one extraordinary inventions of our culture—the properly enlightened person is moved by benevolence, because having got over all the various kinds of fruits of darkness, of unenlightenment, trying to get ahead in order to get a narrow advantage for oneself and so on, fears and superstition ... get rid of all that, and what is there waiting to bubble up, waiting to flow out, is a kind of natural benevolence. And this is a kind of imitation of, transposition of, a second version of agape. But it's meant to be entirely naturalised, there's no reference to the divine, no idea that to follow this right the way through involves breaking open the ordinary self-contained manner of existence of human life, we just follow, as it were, our best instincts to get to this enlightenment.

MH: This doesn't seem to me a version of agape at all. It seems to me that they are taking the fruits of agape.

CT: Yeah, sure, but it's definitely an indication of it. It is very powerfully affected by it, downstream of it. It couldn't be conceivable to enter the culture without

drawing on love. So in that sense you might say it's a caricature of it, but it relates to it very much in some such way, an imitation, or caricature, second version of.

MH: That seems to me to be the best modern example of something that's following up agape. Are there others besides universal beneficence? Dignity and respect perhaps?

CT: Well, no, the idea of dignity and respect, it follows other features of the Christian outlook: each human being is chosen by God and has a special dignity, and as chosen by God the ultimate judgement is not in our hands, it's in God's hands, and so on. So there are other features of the whole outlook which are reflected in other features of modern culture like dignity, rights, but the specific feature which reflects agape is this idea that there is waiting to be released in us this great benevolence. If you only get rid of all the questions, the superstition, fear, and so on, the river then flows.

MH: Moving on but in quite a similar vein, you just mentioned transcendence and I've just been reading a little of your dialogue with Martha Nussbaum in this regard. I was wondering how your interpretation of transcendence would differ from hers, particularly as she expounds it in *Love's Knowledge*, where she is directly confronting your review of *Fragility of Goodness*. It seems to me that when we talk about transcendence in terms of transcending the self, getting a moral source which is beyond the self, that this is something very different and something fundamentally important.

CT: Yeah, I'm talking about this radical de-centring of the self, to use that expression I used before, *theocentrism*, the expression of people in the 17th century. So it's not possible to draw your ethic entirely from what you consider to be the natural human norm. By that I mean what can be seen to be the best self-fulfilment of the human being by human beings. So you can go a long way with that. You can get people like John Stuart Mill who point out that you're happier if you give yourself some cause involving other people

than if you simply remain inured in self-regarding actions. But the idea is still that that kind of more altruistic behaviour normally fits and should normally fit within a human life where the goal of the whole thing is a fulfilled life. My living a fulfilled life, I would have an even more fulfilled life if it includes things like helping my fellow human being. So it all fits within that overall framework which we see as human fulfilment and happiness. That's another way of naturalising benevolence.

MH: And would you consider that a kind of transcendence?

CT: Well it's a kind of transcendence, I mean the word transcendence may be the wrong word. I forgot if I used it, maybe I did use it in my review of her *Fragility of Goodness*.

MH: Just as a brief passing thought in the end which she picks up on in *Love's Knowledge* quite significantly in her last essay which is called 'Human Transcendence' or something like that.

CT: OK, so maybe I did, maybe I didn't use the word transcendence, but it's not necessarily the best word.

MH: She seems to be picking up the idea that transcendence means becoming god-like. But she also says there are other kinds of transcendence like, for instance, she talks about Aristotle's mean, and the fact that there are a lot of different ways of getting it wrong, and only one way of getting it right, and transcending in that regard would be living the virtuous life, the good life as a virtuous person. Getting it right by transcending all these human, all too human, ways of being. But it seems to me that there's a completely different kind of transcendence when you're talking about moral sources and sources as theocentric sources.

CT: Well, what I was talking about in that article ... you see I was thinking of Plato and you don't really understand Plato very well unless you see in some way his asking you to believe in or go beyond the notion of the fulfilled

human life. One way of reading Plato is in terms of this radically de-centring of what one considers a normal fulfilled human life of nature. So if I used the word transcendence that's what I was trying to use it for, it's nothing to do with the kind of superman, a Nietzschean superman, or becoming like God—the idea of which is that I make part of my human fulfilment that I would have the powers of God. No, it's to do with de-centring out of that, even being ready to sacrifice it, give it up, make a leap beyond that. And that which you see very clearly in the Cross, in the Christian Faith, which you see in Buddhism in another way, it can't be fitted into Martha's category. The thing is that she has a very interesting attempt in a lot of her work to devise this ethic, this human ethic based a bit on Aristotle, looking at different aspects of life, and you see what the proper way to behave is and you usually give them a name, and these are the virtues and this is what we ought to aim at. And it's an up to date Aristotle in that it has a number of excellences, albeit 20th century excellences, that he wouldn't have understood, but it's still an attempt to get the view of ethics all within one framework, the framework of a fulfilled human life. Then these demands enter across, come across that target, where they can't be fitted within it. It's not another bit of fulfilment which we've got to cram into the picture with everything else. It is something that can take you quite outside and beyond that, can make a sacrifice of that. And you can't put rules down for that, it's got to be lived out in your life. There isn't a criterion.

MH: Would you consider that agape is a transcendent good in this way, the way it's been conceived and Christianity being theocentric?

CT: That's right, if transcendent has this meaning now that we've given it, then that is, yes, that's a call to transcendence in exactly that sense.

MH: In terms of conflicting goods and the way we assess what's right and wrong, if we're looking to bring into this picture this kind of transcendent morality, a theocentric morality, what prevents us from allowing some radical moral

interpretation, say something from the Old Testament like Abraham sacrificing Isaac, or something like this past weekend, the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin because the murderer says he was acting on divine revelation? 'I was told to do this' ... and it's sort of a trump from this supposed theocentric morality. How do we fit that into our moral reasoning?

CT: Well it's not something that you can provide ultimate criteria for or even point to it. Why do I feel that—whatever, I forgot his name—why don't I feel this is the hand of God? Well because it's murder. And I don't feel that I'm totally without guidelines as to what God wants of us. But on the other hand there is an element of personal calling, being right is in some sense all that. There are some general things we can say about what we ought to do. Then there is this personal calling to go beyond that which comes in people's lives in totally different ways, and which involves some development of some personal relationship with God. But we do have some general guidelines, and it strains altogether my view of them to think this is a genuine call when it totally calls you to scrap those guidelines and commit something horrible.

MH: So there has to, in some sense, be a fit with the way we understand morality and these theocentric demands.

CT: Yes, but not just morality but the theocentric demands as they are understood. I mean we're not left without anything because we have the example in the Gospel, a paradigm example of transcending, of giving it all up. Of course, in doing all that, well we have a story that doesn't involve murder. It involves being murdered. It doesn't involve using force. There even are specific events of the story, episodes of temptation which involve being effective—normal, historical ways of being effective. Wow! Big splash! And people are using the power of the state ... and these are deliberately set aside. The story is that these are rejected. So we're not left totally without guidelines. If somebody comes along and says 'We'll wipe all these people out because God told me to,' it doesn't square with what one finds in history, in the Gospels.

MH: I find a lot of that in the Old Testament.

CT: Yeah, in the Old Testament there is a lot of that.

MH: But is that any different? I mean there's a theocracy there where they're committing genocide.

CT: Yes, I don't know how we can ultimately respond to that. Whether we want to say that those were earlier understandings or cruder understandings. But from that point of view, the New Testament simply supersedes that.

MH: Yes, that's something that I'm not really sure how to respond to either.

CT: I'm not quite sure how to word my answer or justify the detail of my answer, but I don't have any doubt that something like that is the answer. I mean that this story here in the New Testament is the one that is normative. Where they differ, it is the one to go with. So to me we're not left without guidelines, but you can't reduce it to some exact type of criteria. There are going to be new kinds of calling all the time, which may sound in some ways strange in relation to the previous system. So the idea of mendicant friars of St. Francis, nobody had quite thought of that before. There were monks, there were lay people and there were clergy. And now we had this completely new way of operating which didn't have any precedence, except that it fit very well with agape, with this kind of ethic.

APPENDIX F

Transcript of Interview

No. 6: 14/11/95

MH: I wanted to talk about something we were talking about last week which was agape, but let me start with something else. One of the things I picked up on in your work was the way you argue against the fact/value distinction so that when we're reasoning morally we are reasoning from a standpoint, we're not reasoning as disengaged 'punctual selves'. We've got a view from somewhere and we're also reasoning with other human agents who also have certain dispositions. OK, let me take that and put it here to one side for a moment, and pick up the idea of agape. What we were talking about last week was agape as an empowering way of being seen as good. God creates us as good, and by this we are empowered to love, by this moral source. Now with this idea of agape then, before we even begin to interact with each other we have this sort of background of being loved or being seen as good by God. So what I'm wondering is does this have any effect on, or does this play any role in, the way we have this inability to approach moral reasoning from a neutral standpoint?

CT: Yeah, well, the inability to approach moral reasoning from a neutral standpoint is really that without some first-off, what people call intuitions, you don't get moral reasoning going at all. That is some very strong sense that yeah, this is higher than that or this is great or this is good or this is noble or something like that. And reason takes the form of critically examining that, and raising issues about 'Am I just going with the feeling of the moment, or is this the result of this distortion?', and so on, rather than taking a form where it would start from a completely neutral condition without leading anywhere, and then build up from that reasons leading somewhere. You don't build up reasons to lead somewhere. You at best let them in and let them become

evident to us. Now *that* I think is the situation in which human moral reason always takes place, and the contrary assumption is one of these epistemologically generated illusions that get in the way of seeing what's going on. Now for someone with the theological bent that I have and that you have, the reality that you can let in is this one that you described—about being loved by God. To allow that in and to see, and to have a sense of what that is, and to see things in that light, is to see that some things are obviously good, right, and should be strived for, and so on. That is the basis of moral reasoning.

MH: So is that simply labelling something that is already there, how does this work with the whole—I've just been reading some of your dialogue with Rorty—idea of different schemes, how does that all fit with the distinction and wanting to keep up with different schemes.

CT: Well, I'm not linking it very well, I mean my point is that you can't do away with something like the scheme/content distinction, because people as a matter of fact culturally do come from very different places, and they in certain important respects fail to understand each other, talk past each other, can't grasp the central concept. So the concept *agape*, if you like, is totally off the map of lots of people that I know who just don't have a place for that.

MH: Is that because of cultural differences?

CT: Well, it can be because of what people call cultural differences, or you can just redefine cultural differences to mean these kinds of things, but it can also be because of what people right away call cultural differences ... because within something like the same culture in the modern west there are people who have burrowed themselves into an outlook that is so far away from, let's say, this 'theological dimension', that for them the thing barely exists. Or even more dangerously than this concept—coming from the set of seeds where you know right off that you're not going to understand it—they think they know about love, and God, so in a sense the misunderstanding is even

greater, because it's concealed beneath a belief in one's own understanding. It is sealed by the presumption on their part that coming from this culture, 'Of course I know about Christian love,' and so on. So maybe I'm answering your question in a rather round about way, there are misunderstandings that are within a single culture, which in some ways are even more pernicious or dangerous or difficult to get at. Because all sides think 'we all know what we're talking about, we just disagree.' It's very clear that there are certain features of the whole way of looking at things that the Christian has that are just off the map.

MH: Now if I as a Christian am thinking that God is relating to me in this particular way, this transcendent being, as being loved, and that empowers me, I'm not quite sure how I can distinguish that, and leave it there without saying 'Yes, but if we leave behind these notions of agape and try and get into this universal beneficence and all these other ideas of what it is right to do, we're not going to be empowered to do this.' So it's seems like in one way you are trying to say well this is just the Christian take on things, but in another way you're saying without these strong goods which emerge from Christianity or from Judeo-Christian ideas, we're not going to be able to get anywhere, in fact we're going to be caught in this death spiral down into—

CT: Yeah, but those are overlapping, but different takes. You see I think I put it more dramatically. I think I said a Nietzschean could agree on that take, or some version of that. Namely that you can't dedicate yourself this much to the good without some kind of severe self-denial, self-destruction, and so on. But you could draw from that the conclusion that we ought to dump this great emphasis on benevolence. So it's not simply a comment that arises from a Christian perspective. From a Christian perspective you might say that ... well let me put it this way, if that point is true (and I think it is true) it can saliently come to your attention either because you have some model of real sanctity and you see how far you fall short of that—you see the demands as demands that make sense in the light of that so there's a problem from that

standpoint—or you can be an enemy of the kind of self-denial involved in this, see it as standing in the way of some kind of self-affirmation of the Nietzschean kind, and therefore this maybe be a view from which this point flips up to you and you see it. Even though your liberally committed, benevolent neighbour may on the whole have a better, or anyway less destructive, view than you do, he is incapable of seeing it. There are different standpoints from which this thing can flip up. If we want to treat it as a truth that you either see or don't see which is the way I think of it, the way I like to argue, then there are different standpoints from which it can become evident to us.

MH: The connection that I see, and it is a hunch, I'm not sure quite how to argue this, is that these moral intuitions, ones that see things as right and wrong, are in some way affected by the fact that we are in this relationship with God, we have this source empowering us to do good. And it's something that I think the argument against the fact/value distinction contributes to in opening up to allow the fact that we're not starting from nowhere. Even in our initial articulations and stumblings around we still have this relationship, not only with God, but with other goods that are empowering us unwittingly or not as far as we're concerned. Does that make any sense?

CT: Yeah, I think I see what you're getting at. Is the connection with the fact/value distinction that what we're describing here are these empowering sources, these, if you like, facts which by their very nature can't be thought to be neutral, they only can be understood if you take them as read? Yeah, I think that's right. These are facts that are themselves *not* neutral facts. You can't grasp them if you see them as just purely neutral. And that's one of the great issues you see between the ... I mean this fact/value dichotomy stuff is another throw-off from the epistemological representational position. I mean, why should it always be the case that one can get a neutral description—whatever value is put forward you can carve off a neutral description? Well this epistemological reconstruction underlies the feeling that we always can

do that, but if you drop that as your *a priori* and allow yourself just to look at how we actually function, and what it is to know the world and so on, it becomes not at all evident that it is the case.

MH: Yes, there's a striking parallel there between the moral world and the epistemological world.

CT: Yes, more than that this view of morality is generated by the basic epistemological premise.

MH: Now I see there's a lot of mileage to be gotten out of the Contact Theory here in terms of having a criterionless relationship with God in a way. That you start with God as just *is*. This relationship with the human agent just is the way it is, and there is no sort of foundation to build upon here, you don't step outside that and calculate A plus B and get agape, there is something intrinsic there and this is what shows up.

CT: That's right, that's right.

APPENDIX G

Notes from Interview No. 7: 28/11/95

MH: What is your opinion of the Church today?

CT: I am very much opposed to the Church trying to get back to Christendom, like what I see happening in Eastern Poland or Northern Ireland. I don't agree with the idea of controlling everybody or trying to get everyone to conform under the authority of the Church. What I find good are the ways of manifesting the Gospel, not just on the great levels such as Mother Theresa of Calcutta, but on the brother and sister level. On the level of the everyday. We are 'catholic' in that we are whole. The etymology of the Greek word is important here.

MH: Is there anything in the Catholic Church that you just don't agree with?

CT: Yes, I think this idea of hierarchy of power which sees the papacy as bringing everyone into line is wrong. It's very much along same lines as the Christendom idea. That the Pope is this extreme authority—although John XXIII was not that bad in this respect—and that we must come under his authority.

MH: Can you see a case for incorporating ideas you have formulated in the moral/political arena in the Christian community?

CT: Well, if we see the Church as catholic, as universal, then we can see what I am trying to do in terms of politics, in terms of embracing diversity etc., as a way of looking at the Catholic Church. Not as a church setting up boundaries like early heresy dominations and so on, but as one tearing down boundaries, as a community of diversity. Then things from moral and political theory can

ring true in this context. Also the need for articulation becomes all the more relevant in such a situation—the idea of living the vision of the gospels. This is tremendously powerful. Everything that attempts to do this is really against this grabbing at power which is going back to the role of the Church in Christendom. I like a lot of the things the Reformation did, bringing back the importance of the Bible, holiness in everyday, etc., but I don't like them doing away with things like the monastic life, etc. There are too many barriers here too.

MH: Where does Congar fit into your influence?

CT: He has this whole idea of layman, of taking the boundary between bishop and layman away but then defining bishop and church officer in new way ... this importance of destroying a lot of the boundaries. A lot of what eventually came to be the Vatican II paper was designed by de Lubac and Congar, but I read them before the Vatican II council.

MH: Your identity as Christian and as philosopher, how do they merge?

CT: Well, one can see that in philosophy we are not starting with any given belief, but we try and argue towards a particular view. In Christianity we begin with a viewpoint. I don't do philosophy from the viewpoint of any assumption. A lot of people like Quentin Skinner accuse me, are constantly attacking me, for doing this, for coming from the theological assumption. But I say, 'Hey look at it right there, read it on the paper, if you have an objection to the argument let's hear it', etc. If we begin with assumptions in philosophy I do not think that is philosophy. That doesn't mean that my assumptions won't lead me to see certain things that the atheist, for example, may be blind to. Take all the points I make in the beginning of *Sources* about implicit moral goods—Platonic/Aristotelian viewpoint. But then a Nietzschean could point out to us who are not used to seeing it, all the vicious ways of religious actions, and we could wake up to them—it doesn't mean they do not exist because of his motivation or genealogy.

MH: A great number of people have naturally compared you to Alasdair MacIntyre as a Catholic, and as one influenced by Aristotle and so on. Are there any profound differences in your beliefs?

CT: Two, which may in fact be one difference. They may meet somewhere higher up. First he is much more pessimistic about the state of modernity than I am. I have not picked Alasdair up on this specifically because he has not addressed this in any length, but there is a hint of it as a theme running throughout his writing. I see certain goods in modernity, like ethics of authenticity, etc. While modernity is not without criticism from me, Alasdair thinks that after Aquinas we have been spiralling downwards. Secondly, politically, he used to be way to the left of me, in his Trotskyite days, but now he has completely given up on any hope of political improvement. He has become politically pessimistic. He thinks that the state of the political arena in modern democracy is hopeless, and that there is only value in the smaller communities. I certainly don't agree with this.

MH: Shifting gears completely, how would you balance the belief of Natural Law and the Stoics with the need for personal relationships?

CT: Well yes, I'm not really quite clear on this because I'm not clear about where the Stoics are, but it seems to me that there is something fundamentally different between the Stoics and the Gospel. In the Gospel you have the idea of Providence and this higher good, but you also have the idea of agape, the love of others, and I think that the two are the same—in being higher you are involved in agape. If you are in this higher order, you naturally love in this way when you are like this. In this sense agape trumps out the Stoic notion of *apathe*. We are allowed the passions of agape, so we interact with one another in this way *while* embracing, and *by* embracing this higher order or Providence. The idea of 'Tikkun', of 'healing the world' ... the Jewish phrase is also in the Christian theology, and here there is a dissimilarity as well. The Stoics have the order of the world and nothing is wrong with it. The

Christians see agape as getting right again. These acts of beneficence are acts of healing. This is a big difference between Stoics and Christians.

MH: What is your view on the Scripture, is it the same as other sacred texts, or the same as Eliot's *Four Quartets*, for example?

CT: No, it is not the same as an artist's writing because we have a whole history of the first people, Jews and then Christians, in special relationship with God, and it is both the history describing it and the actual relationship itself in the text and there is just something categorically different about that. We have the rich history of the people and we have communication from God in this very particular way. As far as other texts, I suppose the Koran is the closest thing to this although that is very different and distinct. I don't think we can compare them, I don't think that we can stand outside of this and try and adjudicate between the various texts. I think that as far as our western Christian tradition there is a fundamental difference between scriptures and artists' writing. As far as what makes up the canon I don't know, I think we have to trust the decisions of the Church and the role it plays here.

MH: One final area I want to ask you about is epiphanic art. How do you recognise it? Intuition?

CT: Yes, it is intuition, with a clause added to this. I mean we get it through intuition, but we get it after training, shaping, careful thought, reflection. That is what educated intuition is all about.

MH: What does this art communicate, does it need to be necessarily narrative?

CT: I don't think so, no. I have yet to hear a good argument that says it has to be narrative. Look at music, we are moved by music ...

MH: So is it just being moved, is there a moral import here?

CT: Yes, it gives us insight into the possibilities of transcendence.

MH: But how is there a connection between being moved and this moral insight? What about in something that is abstract such as Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles*?

CT: Well we see things in Beethoven's last quartets which are tremendously powerful, which communicate and create a language. There is a kind of language theory involved here. Like the expressivist theory. That in communicating these kinds of expressions they are also creating them.

MH: So we can translate this to Pollock and say that he is communicating in a language that is at the same time being created, even if we cannot translate that language into our verbal grammar?

CT: Yes, that's right.

APPENDIX H

Explanation of Contact and Representation Theories of Knowledge by Charles Taylor for McGill University Seminar 1995

Theories of Knowledge: Contact v. Representation

I

A representational theory (R-theory) is one where: a content description of the knower's awareness can be always given without any commitment concerning the object (allegedly) known.

For a contact theory (C-theory), this condition doesn't hold.

II

C-theories construe knowledge in terms of contact with reality, variously conceived. This contact is seen as self-authenticating.

R-theories mistrust 'self-authentication'. They demand some proof of 'contact'. They look for a 'criterion'.

This means that we construe our epistemic predicament not as one of contact/noncontact with reality, but as our having representations bearing on reality. This requires a stance of disengagement.

Knowledge comes from examining representations. We need a **procedure** to generate **certainty**.

The role of argument differs: for C-theories, it may help us to recover contact; for R-theories, it **generates** certainty, and hence knowledge.

III

R-theories demand:

1) disengagement:

- a) of representations from their objects
(‘transcendental disengagement’)
- b) of thinking from embodiment
- c) of my thinking from community/authority

2) careful scrutiny of our representations:

- a) distinguishing their elements,
- b) examining their articulations,
- c) assembling their elements by a reliable procedure.

Let 1) and 2) be called the ‘procedural demands’

These go along with a spiritual outlook of disengagement: a peculiar sense of power, and certain moral demands and ideals, such as: A) self-given certainty, self-mastery; B) monological self-responsibility; C) the heroism of disenchantment.

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